



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



MONDAY — 14 FEB 2022

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Events, Opportunities

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| HEADLINE | 02/14 Frustration but lifting mandates 'premature' |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/14/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#biden-acknowledges-frustration-with-covid-rules-but-says-ending-mask-mandates-is-probably-premature |
| GIST | <p>President Biden responded to American frustration with pandemic restrictions, saying that it was still too soon to lift indoor mask mandates, while suggesting that other restrictions may soon be able to end.</p> <p>In the roughly 22-minute interview, some of which was previewed before Sunday, Mr. Biden said that decisions by some state governors last week to begin lifting indoor mask mandates were “probably premature,” but acknowledged that it was a “tough call.”</p> <p>Most mandates will not expire immediately, though some, like Nevada's, did. New York's requirement that businesses ask customers for proof of vaccination or require mask wearing expired on Thursday.</p> <p>A CBS poll taken last week found that a majority of Americans still support mask mandates, including in schools, but that many are exhausted and frustrated by the pandemic. Public health experts agree that mask requirements in schools should not last forever, but some experts say that lifting school mask mandates too early could jeopardize the progress made over the last few weeks as cases declined.</p> <p>Mr. Biden said that rising rates of childhood vaccination, as well as the potential authorization of vaccines for even younger children, could allow schools to end their own mask mandates.</p> <p>“Every day that goes by, children are more protected,” Mr. Biden said, adding that “the more protection they have, probably you’re going to see less and less requirement to have the masks.”</p> <p>U.S. cases are falling fast, down to about 175,000 daily, a nearly two-thirds drop over two weeks, according to a New York Times database. But hospitalizations, at about 95,000, and deaths, at more than 2,400 daily, remain very high.</p> <p>As governors relaxed rules, officials in some cities, counties and school districts indicated that they would keep their own mandates in place, adding new complications to an already confusing array across the country.</p> <p>In New Jersey, Gov. Philip D. Murphy announced that school employees and students would no longer be required to wear masks beginning the second week of March. NJ.com reported that the Camden City School District would still require masks. Katrina McCombs, a superintendent for the district, told the outlet that while it was encouraging to see case numbers dropping in the state, school officials still “want to make sure our young people continue to be safe while in our care.”</p> |

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| | <p>The mayors of Boston and New Haven, Conn., also said masks would still be required in schools after their states' mandates expire at the end of February.</p> <p>In California, health officials in some counties, including Marin, Orange, Sacramento, San Francisco and San Diego, pledged to lift strict local rules when the state does later this month. Other counties, however, including Los Angeles and Santa Clara, said they would not ease restrictions until rates of vaccination, transmission and infection had improved.</p> <p>Lester Holt, who hosted the NBC interview with Mr. Biden, said that many of the people in the audience of this year's Super Bowl would not be wearing masks, in violation of local law in Inglewood, Calif.</p> <p>"I love how people talk about personal freedom," Mr. Biden said in response. "If your exercising personal freedom puts someone else in jeopardy, their health in jeopardy. I don't consider that being very dealing with freedom."</p> <p>Mr. Biden added: "People should get the shots. We know the shots work. We know they work for the variants that we are dealing with now."</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Covid subsiding: 19% cases, 1% deaths |
| SOURCE | https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/02/13/world-covid-19-0-decades-deline-19-korean-daily-record/7801644760451/ |
| GIST | <p>Feb. 13 (UPI) -- COVID-19 is subsiding worldwide with a 1% weekly decline in deaths and 19% drop in cases as only Russia, Germany, Netherlands and South Korea set national daily marks among large nations in the past week.</p> <p>With coronavirus waning and vaccine usage percentages rising, nations are dropping restrictions, including lockdowns and required mask wearing and social distancing.</p> <p>In the past seven days, global cases increased 16,053,879 for a total of 412,089,674, according to tracking by Worldometers.info far Sunday. Deaths, which lag a few weeks behind infections, increased to 72,744, for a total of 5,834,176. One week ago, the cases declined 15% and deaths went up 10%.</p> <p>Cases hit a daily record of 3,803,734 Jan. 20, and it dropped Sunday to 1,494,795. On Dec. 13, it was down to 480,954. During the height of the Delta variant spike, cases reached 904,084 on April 29.</p> <p>Deaths rose 5,722 Sunday and 13,032 Tuesday, the highest since late May last year, and a record 17,530 on Jan. 27 a year ago.</p> <p>Since Omicron was first detected in South Africa on Nov. 24, most nations had set daily cases records.</p> <p>But only a few big nations broke marks last week and they were spread around the world: Germany (247,128 Thursday), Russia (203,766 Saturday), Netherlands (189,377 Tuesday) and South Korea (56,425 Sunday).</p> <p>South Korea reported 323,187 cases in the week and rose to 1,350,630, a 102% gain, with cases under 4,000 daily before the Omicron detection.</p> <p>Other nations with recent daily cases records include United States 904,168, France 501,635, Italy 228,1279, Brazil 286,050, Britain 218,724, Spain at 161,688, Australia 153,968, Argentina 134,439, Turkey 111,157, Japan 100,949, Israel 83,739, Mexico 60,552, Canada 55,350, Greece 50,126.</p> <p>Indonesia, with 278 million people, had been relatively immune from the spike, but cases rose 282,829 in one week, an increase of 89% from the prior week, for a total of 4,807,778 in 17th, including 44,526 Sunday a day after 55,209 with the record 56,715 in mid-July last year during the Delta surge.</p> |

Other nations are returning to a sense of normalcy.

"As we get out of the full-blown pandemic phase of COVID-19, which we are certainly heading out of, these decisions will increasingly be made on a local level rather than centrally decided or mandated," Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, told The Financial Times.

There is a "but."

"Everything I am saying is based on a big caveat," Fauci told the Washington Post. "We must be prepared for the eventuality that we might get a completely different variant that breaks through all of the protection that you get from prior infection."

Vaccination have helped mitigate the outbreak.

In all, more than 10.3 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered, an increase of 100 million in one week with the world's population of 7.9 billion, according to Bloomberg tracking.

Broken down by world regions, the United States and Canada have administered at least one dose to 77% of the population, followed by Latin America at 75%, Asia-Pacific 74%, Europe at 68%, Middle East 53% and Africa at 16%, according to The New York Times tracking.

Most nations in Europe are heavily vaccinated. In the European Union, it's 75.3%, including 87.0% in Spain, 83.2% in Denmark, 82.7% in France, 84.6% in Italy, 77.2% in Netherlands, 75.9% in Austria, 76.1% in Germany. Britain, which has left the EU, has a 78.3% rate.

Russia is lagging the world in vaccination with 53.2% of its population with at least one dose of a domestic-produced vaccine, including Sputnik 5.

Two other Eastern European nations have low vaccination rates: Ukraine at 37.5% and Romania at 42%. Poland's rate is 59.1% and Czech Republic's is 64.9%.

In Europe, cases declined 16%, one week after going down 7% with a world-high 8,519,569 for 144,222,806 in first place among continents. Deaths rose 5%, the same percentage as the week before to a total of 1,661,187, also in first place.

In Germany, cases surged early during the Omicron variant and they continue to reach record levels. They rose 4% last week, a world-high 1,333,413 and have risen to eighth in the world at 12,294,820. On Sunday so far, 15,958 infections were reported.

Until Nov. 4, the record was 32,546 on April 14.

Deaths rose 20% after a weekly gain of only 1% in Germany. On Dec. 24, Germany reported 575 deaths, the most since 589 on Feb. 16. Sunday's gain was 19 for 120,552 in 14th. Deaths are nowhere near the record of 1,249 on Dec. 29.

Germany extended a nationwide lockdown for the unvaccinated, including nonessential services, and social distancing rules. But German Health Minister Karl Lauterbach mentioned easing restrictions ahead of the Easter holidays in April.

"We still haven't reached the peak of the wave," he said. "Relaxing restrictions when case numbers are at their highest would be like pouring petrol into the fire."

France reported the fourth-most cases in the world in the past week, 1,794,307, behind Germany, Russia and the United States but decreased 43%. France's 21,708,827 total cases are fourth in the world.

France has the worst infection rate among large nations: 330,077 per million with the world at 50,732. Britain is at 266,806 and United States at 237,310. Israel's rate is 364,011.

Sunday's increase was 86,562.

France is 11th in deaths, passing Iran in the past week, at 134,804, including 107 Sunday,.

With most restrictions ended, indoor mask mandates will end Feb. 28 though they will still be necessary on public transportation.

Vaccinations are necessary to attend events or travel on trains in France, as negative tests will no longer be accepted.

In England, Plan B restrictions ended. That includes working from home if possible, no mandatory masks in public or a vaccine pass to enter venues.

Last week Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced he wants to abolish all regulations, including the requirement to isolate after testing positive, in England starting Feb. 24.

Britain's deaths are 159,570 in seventh, including 52 Sunday with a 26% weekly drop. The record is 1,824 in January one year ago.

Britain's cases decreased 29% with 41,270 Sunday for a total of 18,266,015 in fifth.

On Sunday, Russia reported 706 deaths, with the record 1,254 on Nov. 19, for a total of 340,248 in fourth place. Russia's cases are up 29% and deaths 3%.

Amid the spike, the mandatory quarantine after a positive test went from two weeks ago seven days. And people no longer need to have a negative test.

In deaths elsewhere, Italy is ninth with 151,015, including 191 Sunday. In the top 20: Poland 15th with 108,120, rising by 31; Ukraine 16th with 102,808, including 140 more; and Spain 18th with 95,995 and no data on weekends.

Italy reported 51,959 infections Sunday. Until the recent spike, the record was 41,198 in November 2020.

Italy's nightclubs and dance venues opened Friday for the first time in six weeks. Like other events, they only will need to display a "green pass" proving they have been vaccinated, recovered or tested negative recently.

Spain now is allowing non-EU travelers between the age of 12 and 17 if they have a vaccination certificate. Also gone is the outdoors mask mandate in most situations.

Four Nordic nations, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland, announced the lifting of restrictions.

In Asia over the past week, cases were down 9% with a total of 108,234,284 and deaths increased 7% to 1,319,655, one week after 45%.

India holds the world daily record for deaths, not including major reconciliations: 6,148 last June. The Delta variant emerged in India.

India's cases declined 60% with 44,877 Sunday to 42,631,421 in second place behind the United States. Since the Omicron strain, the most cases have been 347,254 in January. Until that time, cases were under 40,000.

Fatalities dropped 16%, including 684 Sunday, one week after rising 68% The total is 508,665 in third behind the United States and Brazil.

Starting Monday, India will end at-risk category of countries and instead wants self-monitoring for 14 days for symptoms, instead of the previous rule of home quarantine for seven days.

India, which is the prime manufacturer of vaccines for the world, has a one-shot rate for the entire population of 69.4%.

In Mainland China, where COVID-19 originated more than two years ago, the nation of 1.5 billion people, the largest in the world, no deaths have been reported in a year.

The bulk of China's fatalities were reported only a few months after the first confirmed one on Jan. 9, 2020. The last reported fatality was Jan. 28, 2021, and the figure now is 4,636 in 84th behind Palestine with 4,996. Cases reported Sunday: 67.

China has adopted a zero-tolerance stance on coronavirus, locking down cities of several million people and massive testing.

And this has been applied to the Summer Olympics in a "closed loop" with 60,000 competitors, journalists and other officials cut off from others and being tested for COVID-19 every day.

Unlike in other nations where events are being played in packed stadiums, including more than 100,000 in the United States, attendance is sparse with no foreigners allowed and only invited guests allowed in venues.

Testing is conducted daily. More than 1.3 million tests have been conducted for 13,492 arrivals, including 2,900 athletes from 84 countries.

A total of 429 Olympics-related cases have been reported since the closed loop launched on Jan. 23, including 182 involving athletes and team officials.

On Sunday, there were three new infections reported with two new arrivals and one in the closed loop.

Japan, which hosted the Summer Olympics during the Delta surge, reported 77,450 cases, seven days after a record 100,959. The total is 3,926,984. Until the surge, the record 6,184 less than two weeks after the Olympics ended.

Japan also added 137 deaths Sunday for a total of 20,387, rising 928 in a week for a 109% gain. The record was set Thursday with 164, not including 227 in mid-May where one area dumped in data.

Japan has a relatively low 30,448 infections per million and its vaccination rate is 80.6%.

More than 90% of the large companies, 118, said they are preparing to administer booster shots to their employees and others, according to a Kyodo News survey.

Tokyo and 34 other prefectures are under a COVID-19 quasi-state of emergency, including refraining from nonessential travel. On Thursday, the capital and 12 prefectures were extended by three weeks through March 6.

U.S. Forces Japan two weeks ago lifted restrictions on its personnel's activities outside bases in Japan.

In South Korea, U.S. military had restrictions but on Friday, service members, their families, civilian employees and contractors are allowed to dine in local restaurants and visit shopping malls.

South Korea added 36 deaths Sunday after a record 109 on Dec. 23.

South Korea's vaccination rate is 86.4%.

The nation has surpassed 50,000 cases Sunday, compared with only 17,515 two weeks ago.

The National Institute of Mathematical Sciences, which is South Korea's state-run think tank, estimated daily new cases could reach a maximum of 360,000 early next month.

Indonesia ranks ninth in the world at 145,176, dropping behind Italy with an increase of 111 deaths Sunday, and 568 in a week, a gain of 168% in a week the same as the week before, but way down from a record 2,069 on July 27. Indonesia has vaccinated 69.5% of its population with at least one dose.

Iran is 12th in deaths at 133,718 deaths, including 148 Sunday, and dropping behind France. Iran's one-shot vaccination rate is 73.0%.

Turkey is seventh in cases, adding 90,542 Sunday, for a total of 12,908,321, and 19th in deaths at 90,542 including 276 new ones. Turkey has a 68.8% vaccination rate.

Vietnam's cases rose 114% with the total 2,510,860, including 26,379 Sunday.

Israel has a death toll of 9,466 with 32 reported Sunday and 20,061 cases for a total of 3,394,765

Israel's one-shot vaccination rate is 73.1%.

"New variants will pop up all the time," Israeli Health Ministry Director-General Prof. Nachman Ash told a radio station last week. "One of the important things we do is be prepared and follow new variants as they develop and assess how dangerous they might be. I hope no new variants will bother us."

The coronavirus cabinet has dropped the requirement to present proof of vaccination for most venues.

Israel has lifted travel bans to destinations in Israel's list of "red" countries with high infection rates, including the United States, Britain and Canada. Instead, protocols are in place.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is advising against travel to Israel, raising it to "Level 4: very high." Most other countries are that designation. Level 1 only includes China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Indonesia. New Zealand and Pakistan head Level 3 with India, Iran, South Korea, South Africa among those on the second-highest level. Japan moved to the highest level in the past week.

In North America, the deaths are 1,363,738 with a 1% weekly decrease, and cases are 93,082,669, declining 19%.

The United States' deaths declined 15% and cases dropped 44%. On Sunday, the United States reported 467 deaths and 31,652 cases though two-thirds didn't report data.

Mexico is fifth in the world in deaths at 312,819 with a weekly increase of 42% and 122 recorded Sunday with the record 1,4127 in late January a year ago. The nation's cases decreased 16% with 8,854 most recently for 15th at 5,292,706.

Canada's cases dropped 31% in one week with 4,401 Sunday for 26th in cases with 3,191,587.

Until the Omicron variant, the record was 11,383 one year ago Jan. 3.

Canada's deaths are down 19% and the nation ranks 26th worldwide with 35,474 including 35 on Sunday with the record 257 on Dec. 29, 2020.

Canada has around one-third the rates per million than the United States with deaths 925 and cases 83,268.

Canada has the best one-shot vaccination rate of the three largest countries in North America at 85%. The United States is at 75.1% for one shot. Mexico's percentage is 65.7%, though it was the first Latin American nation to begin vaccinating people.

For two weeks, Canadian truckers have descended on Ottawa and other cities in protests against the country's COVID-19 restrictions and mandates. The Ambassador Bridge between the United States and Canada was set to reopen Sunday as police continued to arrest "Freedom Convoy" protesters.

Ontario Province will "very soon" lift "almost all" COVID-related restrictions on businesses, Premier Doug Ford said last week.

"There's no doubt they protected our hospitals from collapse and saved lives," Ford said of the restrictions.

In Mexico, no "red" maximum risk states after the risk level in Aguascalientes was downgraded to "orange" in the traffic light risk system. Cancun, a popular tourist designation, is "yellow" as part of Quintana Roo's state.

In South America, cases decreased 25% in one week with a total of 52,093,932 and deaths were up 1% to 1,237,804 one week after 19%.

Brazil reported 325 deaths Saturday with 1,295 Wednesday, the most since last July and the record 4,211 in early April. Brazil's fatalities rose 20% with cases down 22%, with 57,288 most recently.

Also in the top 10 for deaths, Peru is sixth at 208,381 and Colombia is 10th at 137,155. Argentina is 13th with 124,081 and Chile 23rd with 40,558.

On Sunday, Peru added 261, Colombia 162, Argentina 94 and Chile 94.

These numbers are way down from records: Peru with 1,154, Colombia with 754, Argentina with 791, Chile with 316.

Argentina posted 11,322 infections Saturday.

Peru has the world's highest death rate at 6,176 per million people.

Some South American nations have high vaccination rates. Chile has the best vaccination rate on the continent at 90.9% with Argentina 88.2%, Brazil at 82.1%, Colombia at 81% and Peru 77.7%.

Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo Carnival festivities have been postponed to April 21 from Feb. 25 to March 2.

Like South America, it's summer in Oceania.

Australia had largely avoided mass infections until the Omicron surge, with only 2,688 as of Oct. 14. The nation reported 22,786 more cases Sunday, about one-seventh of the record recently.

Overall, the nation has climbed to 29th with 2,901,923. Deaths are 4,593, including 47 more Sunday and 390 in one week for a 26% decline. On Jan. 28, it set a daily record with 134, with the previous mark before Omicron 59 in early September 2020.

Australia has vaccinated 85.2% of its population with at least one dose.

Australia no longer is in lockdown.

In Oceania, cases decreased 3% for a total of 3,124,115 and deaths were down 21% for a total of 7,066.

New Zealand's deaths remained at 53 total for the week and the nation added a record 464 cases Saturday.

New Zealand, which has an 83% vaccination rate, is on a traffic light system. The entire country is in Red, meaning everyone will be required to wear masks in public venues and on public transportation. Customers are limited and events have been called off because of participation curbs.

Though the variant emerged in Africa, the continent's situation has stabilized with a 30% weekly cases drop with a total of 11,332,375. Deaths went up 13% for a total toll of 244,722.

South Africa's infections decreased by 13% and deaths rose 28%.

Overall, South Africa has reported 3,641,811 cases, in 20th worldwide, with 1,649 Sunday. Nine weeks ago there was a record 37,875

The nation is 17th in deaths at 96,993, including 8 Sunday.

South Africa's vaccination rate is only 33.8%.

"Against the odds, including huge inequities in access to vaccination, we've weathered the COVID-19 storm with resilience and determination, informed by Africa's long history and experience with controlling outbreaks," Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization Regional Director for Africa said in a United Nations release last week. "Although COVID-19 will be with us for the long-term, there is light at the end of the tunnel. This year we can end the disruption and destruction the virus has left in its path, and gain back control over our lives."

But she noted COVID-19 has pushed some 40 million people into extreme poverty, according to World Bank estimates.

Tunisia has the second-most deaths with 27,119 ahead of Egypt with 23,292.

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| HEADLINE | 02/14 Iran: nuclear talks 'not at dead end' |
| SOURCE | https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/nuclear-talks-not-dead-end-iran-foreign-ministry-spokesman-says-2022-02-14/ |
| GIST | <p>DUBAI, Feb 14 (Reuters) - Talks to salvage Iran's 2015 nuclear deal are not at a dead end but key outstanding issues require political decisions by the West, Iran's foreign ministry spokesman said on Monday.</p> <p>Iran has already taken its political decision by staying in the deal after Washington abandoned it in 2018, spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh also told reporters in Tehran.</p> <p>Indirect talks in Vienna between Iran and the United States resumed last week after a 10-day break. Delegates have said the talks have made limited progress since they resumed in November after a five-month hiatus.</p> <p>"There is no dead end in Vienna. Negotiations are underway as before and exchanges are taking place between the delegations," Khatibzadeh said.</p> <p>"What is going on today in the talks is a continuation of important and critical points. Our distance from an agreement depends on the will of the West's side," he added.</p> <p>"If the United States and Europe respond to Iran today - within the framework of JCPOA — we can announce in Vienna tomorrow that we have reached an agreement," he said, using the acronym for the official name of the nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.</p> |

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| | <p>Khatibzadeh's assessment came hours after Ali Shamkhani, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, said progress in the talks was becoming "more difficult every moment... while Western parties 'pretend' to come up with initiatives to avoid their commitments".</p> <p>On another issue, Khatibzadeh said a prisoner swap deal with the United States was on the agenda in parallel with the nuclear talks in Vienna.</p> <p>"But it seems the U.S. has not made a decision on it. Perhaps it is waiting for the results of the talks," he said.</p> <p>Iran has in recent years arrested dozens of dual nationals, including several Americans, mostly on espionage charges. It accuses Washington of holding Iranian prisoners allegedly for violations of U.S. sanctions against Iran.</p> <p>Rights activists accuse Iran of trying to use the detentions to win concessions from other countries. Iran dismisses the charge.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/14 New Zealand anti-vaccine mandate protests |
| SOURCE | https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/new-zealands-ardern-labels-anti-vaccine-mandate-protests-imported-crowds-defy-2022-02-14/ |
| GIST | <p>WELLINGTON, Feb 14 (Reuters) - New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said on Monday she felt demonstrations against a COVID-19 vaccine mandate now entering their second week were an "imported" phenomenon, and nothing like anything she had seen before in the country.</p> <p>Hundreds of protesters continue to occupy lawns in front of the distinctive 'Beehive' parliament for a seventh day, ignoring repeated calls by the police to leave and undaunted by drenching rain over the weekend.</p> <p>Claiming inspiration from truckers' anti-vaccine mandate demonstrations in Canada, the protesters have also blocked several streets around parliament with their trucks, vans and motorcycles.</p> <p>"It feels like an imported protest to me," Ardern told state broadcaster TVNZ in an interview.</p> <p>"I've seen Trump flags on the forecourt, I've seen Canadian flags on the forecourt," she said, referring to images of former U.S. President Donald Trump carried by some demonstrators as well as the situation in Canada.</p> <p>Ardern said in a news conference later in the day that the protesters have demanded the government remove all public health COVID-19 measures.</p> <p>"That means at the very point where we are seeing an increase in cases and an increase in risk to the public health and well-being of New Zealand, they want to see removed the very measures that have kept us safe, well and alive. You'll forgive me if I take a very strong view on that suggestion," Ardern said.</p> <p>The protests started as a stand against vaccine mandates but have been joined by groups calling for an end to COVID-19 restrictions, rejecting vaccinations, as well as calling attention to other social issues like censorship and rights of the ethnic Maori community. At the protests' peak, thousands of demonstrators were estimated to be involved.</p> <p>A country of five million people, New Zealand has some of the lowest COVID-19 case numbers in the world, largely due to tough coronavirus border curbs and social restrictions.</p> |

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| | <p>Daily Omicron variant cases have been rising, however, nearly touching 1,000 on Monday, as some domestic restrictions were eased this month.</p> <p>The country's borders, however, are still closed with tens of thousands of expatriate New Zealanders cut off from families.</p> <p>The High Court on Monday started hearing a case against the government filed by a group representing expatriate New Zealanders which has accused the state of unlawfully denying citizens the right to enter the country.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/14 Ukraine hints at concessions to Russia |
| SOURCE | https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-hints-concessions-russia-scholz-heads-region-2022-02-14/ |
| GIST | <p>MOSCOW/KYIV, Feb 14 (Reuters) - Ukraine's ambassador to Britain on Monday backtracked on remarks suggesting that Kyiv would reconsider its attempt to join NATO as Russia masses a huge force within striking distance of its neighbour, but said other concessions could be on offer.</p> <p>The Kremlin said that if Ukraine renounced its aspiration to join the U.S.-European military alliance, that would significantly help address Russia's concerns, and that President Vladimir Putin would meet his foreign and defence ministers on Monday. read more</p> <p>A day after Washington said Russia could now invade Ukraine at any time on a surprise pretext, the Group of Seven large Western economies (G7) warned Russia of "massive" economic consequences if it did so, and promised Ukraine swift support.</p> <p>German Chancellor Olaf Scholz flew to Kyiv for talks, to be followed on Tuesday by a meeting with Putin in Moscow, but a German official said Berlin did not expect concrete results.</p> <p>A senior Russian military officer was quoted by the news agency Interfax as saying Russia was ready to open fire on foreign vessels that entered its waters illegally, though such a decision would have to be approved at the "highest level".</p> <p>Moscow denies planning to invade Ukraine and has accused the West of hysteria, but has made clear that it sees Kyiv's quest for closer ties with the West, notably over NATO, as a threat.</p> <p>Ukrainian Ambassador Vadym Prystaiko was initially quoted by the BBC as saying Ukraine might be "flexible" over this aim, "especially being threatened like that, blackmailed by that."</p> <p>Later, he said he had been misunderstood on NATO - although Ukraine was prepared to make other concessions.</p> <p>'READY FOR CONCESSIONS'</p> <p>"We are not a member of NATO right now and to avoid war we are ready for many concessions and that is what we are doing in conversations with the Russians," Prystaiko told the BBC.</p> <p>"It has nothing to do with NATO, which (membership application) is enshrined in the constitution."</p> <p>The G7 finance ministers said that military aggression by Russia against Ukraine would trigger "economic and financial sanctions which will have massive and immediate consequences on the Russian economy".</p> <p>Oil prices climbed to fresh seven-year highs amid concerns that sanctions would disrupt exports from Russia, a major oil producer, in an already tight market.</p> <p>Russia's stock index slumped to its lowest level in almost three weeks, and the tension reverberated around major European markets, whose indices fell by between 1.6% and 3%.</p> |

The dollar hit a two-week high as investors sought a safe haven. Russian and Ukrainian bond pieces fell sharply.

Sanctions could rebound on Western powers, which rely heavily on Russia for energy supplies, notably gas, as well as other raw materials.

European banks in particular fear that Russia could be excluded from the SWIFT global payment system, which would prevent the repayment of Russian debts.

U.S. aircraft maker Boeing Co buys much of its titanium for airframes from Russia's VSMPO-AVISMA - but said it was confident that other suppliers would enable it to work through any supply chain disruption.

Scholz may receive a cool reception in Kyiv, which has long resented the German-Russian Nord Stream 2 project - a pipeline that will allow Russia to circumvent Ukraine for its gas exports to Germany - and has bristled at Germany's refusal to join other NATO partners in selling it weapons.

'ANY DAY NOW'

The Kremlin said it expected Putin's talks with Scholz on Tuesday to address Ukraine, security guarantees for Russia, and Nord Stream 2, which is awaiting European Union approval.

U.S. President Joe Biden's National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said on Sunday that an invasion could begin "any day now", but U.S. officials said they could not confirm reports that U.S. intelligence indicated it would start on Wednesday.

Sullivan said the United States would also "defend every inch of NATO territory ... and Russia, we think, fully understands that message". Biden told Putin in a phone call on Saturday that any attack would harm and isolate Moscow.

The Kremlin said Putin told Biden that Washington had failed to take Russia's main concerns into account, and that it had received no substantial answer on key elements of its security demands.

Washington regards many of the proposals as non-starters but has pushed the Kremlin to discuss them jointly with Washington and its European allies.

Washington and some European nations have been scaling back or evacuating embassy staff and urging citizens to leave Ukraine. Dutch airline KLM has suspended flights to Ukraine.

Ukraine on Sunday invoked a treaty to demand talks with Russia and members of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe OSCE within 48 hours to discuss Russia's military build-up.

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| HEADLINE | 02/14 Russia's Ukraine plan: does mud matter? |
| SOURCE | https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-joe-biden-moscow-kyiv-environment-and-nature-3aa7f3a45ceb57ba9ef1faa1c5f17ed8 |
| GIST | <p>MOSCOW (AP) — The Russian expression “tanks don’t fear mud” is common enough that it’s been the title of a short-lived Russian television series and can be found stenciled on car windows.</p> <p>And it’s yet another reason why any Russian decision to invade Ukraine is likely to depend very little upon fears that a spring thaw will hinder tanks from crossing boggy ground. Russia’s military has, in addition to tanks and other armored vehicles that are well equipped for mud, a range of fighter jets and missiles that are the hallmarks of any modern military.</p> |

U.S. President Joe Biden has said that Russia is [essentially in position for an invasion of Ukraine](#) “assuming that the ground is frozen above Kyiv,” the Ukrainian capital that is only 75 kilometers (47 miles) from the border of Belarus, a key Russian ally. It’s not the first time an American official has invoked Russia’s need for frozen ground to stage an invasion.

But analysts [trying to figure out how Russia could invade](#) say any assault would start with air and missile strikes, likely targeting Ukrainian military sites.

“If (Russian President Vladimir) Putin agrees to an invasion, then it won’t be tanks or ships in the vanguard, but rather aircraft and missile forces. The first targets for them will be air defense systems and the missile defense force, command posts, critical infrastructure, after which the advantage of Russian forces in the air and upper hand on land and sea are guaranteed,” said Mykola Sunhurovskyi, a military analyst at the Kyiv-based Razumkov Center think tank.

Some Ukrainian analysts have acknowledged that the country’s air defenses are insufficient in case of a massive Russian assault. Kyiv has [prodded its Western allies](#) to provide the country with modern air defense systems in addition to ground combat weapons provided by the U.S., Britain and others.

Sunhorovskyi said “the only deterrent is the West’s position and the readiness of millions of Ukrainians to fight to the end.”

The Kremlin, which has denied having any Ukraine invasion plans, has scoffed at an argument that it wants to see the ground frozen to launch an attack on Ukraine. Ukrainian officials agree that frozen ground or mud isn’t an issue.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov pointed at the argument to taunt British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss following their icy talks in Moscow on Thursday.

“They say that Russia is waiting for the ground to freeze like a stone so that tanks could easily roll into Ukrainian territory,” Lavrov told reporters. “The ground was like that with our British colleagues, with numerous facts we cited bouncing off them.”

Konstantin Sivkov, a Russian military analyst, said even if there were a ground incursion, Russian battle tanks are significantly lighter than Western armored vehicles and don’t get bogged down.

“Our tanks are much better suited for advancing on muddy terrain, there is nothing to worry about,” Sivkov said in remarks carried by the FAN news outlet. “A thaw can only stop Western tanks.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/14 German leader in Ukraine; last ditch effort? |
| SOURCE | https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-olaf-scholz-moscow-vladimir-putin-europe-ddf76e8b58bfa88a1022fef99bbaf3be |
| GIST | <p>KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Ukraine on Monday, part of a flurry of Western diplomacy aimed at heading off a feared Russian invasion that some warn could be just days away.</p> <p>Scholz plans to continue on to Moscow, where he will try to persuade Russian President Vladimir Putin to stand down.</p> <p>U.S. officials have warned that Russia could attack this week. Moscow denies it has any such plans but has massed well over 130,000 troops near Ukraine and, in the U.S. view, has built up enough firepower to launch an attack on short notice.</p> <p>With concerns rising that war could be imminent, some airlines canceled flights to the Ukrainian capital and troops there unloaded fresh shipments of weapons from NATO members Sunday. The United States,</p> |

Britain and other European nations have told their citizens to leave the country and Washington was also pulling most of its staff from the embassy in Kyiv.

Ukraine's air traffic safety agency Ukraerorukh declared the airspace over the Black Sea to be a "zone of potential danger" because of Russian naval drills and recommended that planes avoid flying over the sea Feb. 14-19.

The U.S. and its NATO allies have repeatedly warned that Russia will pay a high price for any invasion — but they have sometimes struggled to present a united front. Scholz's government, in particular, has been criticized for refusing to supply lethal weapons to Ukraine or to spell out which sanctions it would support against Russia, raising questions about Berlin's resolve to stand up to Moscow.

The chancellor's visits this week will thus be closely watched for a signs of deviating from the message delivered by Washington and other NATO allies — but it is also seen as a last-ditch effort to head off war.

So far, those warnings appear to have had little effect: Russia has only beefed up troops and weapons in the region and launched massive drills in its ally Belarus, which also neighbors Ukraine. The West fears that the drills, which will run through Sunday, could be used by Moscow as a cover for an invasion from the north.

Russia has repeatedly brushed off Ukrainian and Western concerns about the military buildup, saying it has the right to deploy forces wherever needed on its territory. On Monday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused Ukraine of fueling tensions by beefing up its forces near the territories controlled by Russia-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine.

Moscow wants guarantees from the West that NATO won't allow Ukraine and other former Soviet countries to join as members, and that the alliance will halt weapon deployments to Ukraine and roll back its forces from Eastern Europe. The U.S. and NATO have flatly rejected those demands.

Some observers expect Moscow to eventually accept a compromise that would help avoid hostilities and allow all sides to save face. While NATO refuses to shut the door to Ukraine, the alliance also has no intention of embracing it or any other ex-Soviet nation anytime soon. Some experts have floated ideas such as a moratorium on NATO expansion or a neutral status for Ukraine to defuse the tensions.

Ukraine's ambassador to the U.K., Vadym Prystaiko, seemed to suggest just such a middle path, telling the BBC on Sunday that the country could abandon its goal of joining NATO — an objective that is written into its constitution — if it would avert war with Russia.

"We might — especially being threatened like that, blackmailed by that, and pushed to it," Prystaiko told BBC Radio 5.

On Monday, however, Prystaiko appeared to back away from that, saying that "to avoid war we are ready for many concessions ... but it has nothing to do with NATO, which is enshrined in the constitution."

Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko also played down Prystaiko's statement.

Asked about Prystaiko's comment, Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, said that Russia would welcome such a move.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Sunday that Kyiv requested a meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in the next 48 hours to discuss the Russian deployments near the country's borders. Russia has argued that it's not obliged to account for its buildup before the OSCE, and such a meeting would be unlikely to defuse tensions.

Tensions in the region further increased Saturday when the Russian Defense Ministry summoned the U.S. Embassy's military attache to protest what it described as a U.S. submarine in Russian waters near the

Kuril Islands in the Pacific. The Russian military said the submarine initially ignored orders to leave, but left after the navy used unspecified “appropriate means.” The U.S. has denied that its submarine ever entered Russian waters.

Asked by lawmakers Monday if the military could strike foreign warships that enter Russian waters, deputy chief of the Russian military’s General Staff Stanislav Gudzmagomedov said the military stands ready for it, but added that such decisions are only made on the highest level.

In an hourlong Saturday call with Putin, U.S. President Joe Biden said that invading Ukraine would cause “widespread human suffering” and that the West was committed to diplomacy to end the crisis but “equally prepared for other scenarios,” the White House said.

Biden also spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for about an hour Sunday, agreeing to keep pushing both deterrence and diplomacy to try to stave off a Russian offensive.

As he has before, Zelenskyy sought to play down the idea that a conflict was imminent, noting that Kyiv and other cities of Ukraine “are safe and under reliable protection.”

His office’s readout of the call also quoted him suggesting that a quick Biden visit would help deescalate the situation — signaling Zelenskyy’s hope the U.S. leader might actually come. That possibility was not mentioned in the White House summary of the call.

Russia and Ukraine have been locked in a bitter conflict since 2014, when Ukraine’s Kremlin-friendly leader was driven from office by a popular uprising. Moscow responded by annexing the Crimean Peninsula and then backing a separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine, where fighting has killed over 14,000 people.

A 2015 peace deal brokered by France and Germany helped halt large-scale battles, but regular skirmishes have continued, and efforts to reach a political settlement have stalled.

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Omicron threat to economy runs thru China |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/omicrons-threat-to-global-economy-increasingly-runs-through-china-11644764401?mod=hp_list_pos1 |
| GIST | <p>The direct economic harm caused by the Omicron variant of Covid-19 in highly vaccinated countries appears so far to be relatively modest and short-lived, but its indirect hit could prove significant if China resorts to repeated lockdowns in its effort to suppress the virus within its borders.</p> <p>Omicron led to a fresh surge in infections wherever it gained a foothold, a rise in deaths, and disruptions for businesses as infected workers sought medical treatment or quarantined.</p> <p>But it has also become clear that Omicron causes milder symptoms in vaccinated people than its predecessors, and an increasing number of European countries have lifted restrictions put in place when the variant emerged. U.S. job growth accelerated in January, even though the number of people not working because of illness more than doubled from December.</p> <p>So while business surveys and other data indicate economic growth slowed in Europe and the U.S. as 2022 began, many economists expect the Omicron variant to do less damage than previous surges.</p> <p>The lifting or absence of restrictions in Europe and the U.S. signals a greater willingness to live with the virus, while remaining alert to its dangers. That is not yet an option where populations have received vaccines that offer very limited protection against Omicron, as is the case in China.</p> <p>That is part of the reason why China continues to pursue a “zero-Covid” strategy, which requires strict lockdowns when local outbreaks occur.</p> |

[China is the world's leading supplier](#) of the parts other manufacturers use to make the products households buy, which are known by economists as intermediate goods. Should it have to lock down significant parts of its economy, the impact would likely be felt in lower growth and higher inflation in Western economies.

“Lockdown risks therefore continue to rise in China, even as they decline elsewhere,” said Frédérique Carrier, head of investment strategy at RBC Wealth Management. “Increased pandemic restrictions could lead to additional supply-chain disruptions, hold back the normalization of the global economy, and fuel global inflation, while capping Chinese economic growth.”

The International Monetary Fund’s economists estimate that supply-chain problems knocked between one half and one full percentage point off global economic growth in 2021, while pushing inflation higher. In other words, the global economy would have grown by as much as 6.9% last year, compared with the 5.9% expansion it actually recorded, if there had been no supply problems.

There are some signs that [supply-chain problems](#) are easing. A new supply- blockages measure developed by economists at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York showed a record level of strain in November, but a decline in December and January, which they said “seems to suggest that global supply chain pressures, while still historically high, have peaked and might start to moderate somewhat going forward.”

A prolonged series of new lockdowns in China, however, could reverse that progress and be a significant drag on growth this year.

“China’s zero-Covid strategy could exacerbate global supply disruptions,” said Gita Gopinath, the IMF’s first deputy managing director.

According to the World Trade Organization, Chinese businesses sold \$354 billion of intermediate goods to overseas buyers in the three months through June 2021, way more than the next largest exporter, which was the U.S. with \$200 billion. The U.S. is the largest market for Chinese exports of intermediate goods, but South Korea, Japan, Germany and India also account for a significant share.

China would likely face a surge in deaths if it were to abandon the zero-Covid strategy now. About 86% of China’s population has been fully vaccinated, but the vaccines most widely used, developed by Sinopharm and Sinovac, use inactivated virus. Those are widely believed to be less effective against Omicron infections than the [mRNA vaccines](#) developed by [Moderna](#) Inc. and by [Pfizer](#) Inc. with [BioNTech](#) SE.

China is accelerating its efforts to produce domestic mRNA vaccines and medicines for Covid-19, said an official familiar with the matter. If it were to be successful, the need for lockdowns would become less pressing. But few expect a shift away from zero-Covid to happen soon.

“We really depend on China succeeding in this transition,” said Jörg Wuttke, president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China and chief representative of German chemical company [BASF](#) SE in the country. “But frankly, it doesn’t look good.”

Assessing the scale of the threat to global supply chains is difficult, given uncertainties about how rapidly Omicron can spread in an environment where restrictions are as tight as they are in China.

Two factors could lessen the impact of a more-rapid spread than has so far occurred. First, economists see the willingness to live with the virus in the U.S. and Europe as opening the way for a greater shift back to [spending on services](#) and away from spending on goods this year. That would ease some of the demand pressures on supply chains.

It is also possible that Chinese authorities could manage the zero-Covid policy to support exports, given the drag on growth from problems in [the country’s property market](#) and weak consumer spending at home.

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| | “We believe the government will make efforts to minimize the supply disruptions, including some loosening/improvement in the zero-Covid policy implementation,” economists at Barclays Bank wrote in a note to clients. |
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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Doctors: not yet end indoor mask mandate |
| SOURCE | https://mynorthwest.com/3346894/doctors-hospital-leaders-wa-not-ready-to-end-indoor-mask-mandate/ |
| GIST | <p>Governor Jay Inslee plans to announce within the next week when Washington will lift its indoor mask mandate.</p> <p>But doctors and hospital leaders at the Washington State Hospital Association’s most recent briefing on Tuesday said they did not believe the state is ready to take that step yet.</p> <p>Washington’s outdoor mask mandate, which applies to large events of more than 500 people such as festivals and ball games, will end next Friday. But when it comes to indoor masking, Washington is one of three states — Hawaii and New Mexico being the other two — to have no mandate end date in sight.</p> <p>“We still have over 100 people per 100,000 people having COVID every day, so I think it’s too soon at this point in this surge,” said Dr. Shaquita Bell, a pediatrician with Seattle Children’s, during the WSHA briefing.</p> <p>She said that she was comfortable with ending the mandate when the state gets down to that level — but as of Friday, Washington is at about 13 times that metric, with just under 1,300 new cases for every 100,000 residents.</p> <p>Inslee said during a press conference on Wednesday that he did not plan to lift the mandate right away, but rather at a time when case, hospitalization, and death rates were down far enough that it would be safe to do so.</p> <p>Similarly, Oregon Governor Kate Brown announced this week that the indoor mask mandate there will lift by the end of March.</p> <p>But Cassie Sauer, president and CEO of WSHA, did not agree with making such an announcement so far ahead of time.</p> <p>“Making a plan for a month or two months from now just doesn’t seem wise,” Sauer said. “It also seems like that’s the kind of decision you could make fast. You don’t have to set up infrastructure to remove masks out of schools. You could just say, ‘We’ve seen the cases decline — starting next week, we’re not going to require masks any longer.’”</p> <p>Dr. Kunal Joshi with Overlake Medical Center pointed out that we thought the pandemic was over last summer and again in the fall — only to be surprised each time with new variants and ensuing surges. He suggested proceeding with prudence.</p> <p>“We get excited because we want our lives back — I get that,” Joshi said. “But I think we should take into account what happened in June, and what happened in September.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 \$Billions for Western forests; manage fires |
| SOURCE | https://crosscut.com/environment/2022/02/billions-federal-dollars-headed-western-forests-manage-fires |
| GIST | Less than a year after Washington state committed \$328 million toward reducing the impacts of climate-charged catastrophic wildfire and improving forest health, the U.S. Forest Service announced a plan liable to supercharge that effort. |

A [U.S. Department of Agriculture announcement](#) on Jan. 18 adds nearly \$3 billion more to the nation's forest restoration efforts and fire reduction, especially on federal forest lands in the heart of Washington's fire country and in 10 other Western states. Just as significant, the accompanying plan incorporates the newest science and reflects Indigenous stewardship practices. The money draws from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act proposed by the Biden administration and passed by Congress, with [potential for more funding from the Build Back Better bill](#), now stalled in the Senate.

Sources in Washington-area forest management say the plan complements the state's current management strategy and recognizes tribal leadership while underscoring the importance of equitable community engagement.

Darcy Batura, forest partnerships manager at The Nature Conservancy in Washington state, calls the plan a "substantial shift."

"Previous plans recognized that we have a big forest health challenge. But now we have a [specific] plan ... and the critical funding to complete the work," she says.

In 2021, Washington state authorized [spending \\$125 million every two years on forest management](#) activities that reduce the amount of flammable material in forests, restore damaged landscapes, respond to wildfire and help communities adapt to the fire conditions of a warmer, drier world. The funding will run eight years for a total of \$500 million.

Sources also say it comes not a moment too soon for a state in which more than half of the landscape is forested, and which has seen more than 7% of its acreage burn since 2015. Of the 3.1 million homes in Washington state, about [1 million are threatened by wildfire](#).

Between fire suppression and climate change, which has led to [abnormally dry](#) and drought conditions, wildfires in Washington state are burning more intensely over lengthening fire seasons.

Hilary Franz, the state commissioner of public lands, says federal lands are the most significantly challenged and in the worst condition in Washington state.

"Even if my agency ... restored all the health of our state land and forests, and even significantly made progress on private lands, we would still see significant catastrophic fires in our state," she tells Crosscut.

"It gives me great confidence that we're going to start to make significant progress on some of the challenges we've had with increasing catastrophic wildfires in Central Washington, as well as increased dying off of those forests," Franz says.

The next 10 years

The federal [Wildfire Crisis Strategy](#) and funding injects nearly \$3 billion into wildfire mitigation, forest management and community preparedness in Western states over the next 10 years. The government's plan for wildfire promises fire-reducing interventions on up to 50 million acres of federal, state, tribal and private land in areas most vulnerable to fire in the central and eastern parts of the state. The Forest Service is calling these areas 'fireshed,' and is preparing a long-term plan for management and adaptation.

Where the U.S. spent decades managing landscapes to eliminate fire and allowing damaging logging practices, the new plan adapts new research and [Indigenous knowledge about how to steward resilient forests](#) in ways that allow fire in smaller, more regular doses. Forest ecosystems self-regulate with fire. By not allowing fires to burn in forests where [regularly occurring fires support forest ecosystem health](#), vegetation can build up and fuel catastrophic fires that outpace firefighting crews.

In the plan, the Forest Service will reduce the amount of flammable materials in forests through thinning and pruning groups of trees, as well as using [controlled burns](#), which emulate those naturally occurring, smaller and less destructive fires and, in turn, reduce flammable materials in forests. Fire can return

nutrients to forest soils, combat disease and insects, allow light to reach smaller plants and, of course, remove dry and dead plants that could wind up fueling fires.

“The implementation plan for the 10-year strategy has all the right ingredients,” Batura says.

The Forest Service identified a few key focus areas to achieve this: Using science to figure out where and how to reduce fuels and improve forest health, ramping up the firefighting and management workforce, centering equity and tribal co-management, building relationships with local agencies and communities, and improving these local groups’ ability to prepare their communities for fires and restore forests that have already burned.

“If we want to have stands of large, old ponderosa pine or western larch, or huckleberry fields, healthy and diverse wildlife habitats, and watershed integrity, then we need to emulate the processes that created the complex, fire-driven mosaics of the past. This plan promises to elevate the rate of work necessary to accomplish that goal,” says Mark Swanson, [a fire ecology researcher](#) and associate professor of silviculture and landscape ecology in the Washington State University School of the Environment.

Swanson appreciates that the Forest Service has multiple tools to choose from when figuring out how to make forests more fire resilient. Prescribed fires aren’t feasible in every forest, and pruning and thinning aren’t always appropriate options.

It’s encouraging to see an emphasis on helping communities adapt to fire, says Ryan Anderson of the Washington Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network, a Forest Service-sponsored organization that helps communities prepare for or recover from fire and invest in adaptation strategies. Anderson also appreciates the intent to invest in and prioritize equity in leadership and which communities receive help.

Including tribal nations in decisions and leadership, sources say, is crucial. Failure to do so has contributed toward fires that devastated nations like the Colville Tribes, which [sued the federal government](#) last year for damages incurred by fire in 2015 on forest lands the government holds in trust for tribes. Representatives of the Colville Tribes were not available for comment by publication time.

Department of Natural Resources officials say the plan complements and even overlaps [Washington state’s 20-year forest management plan](#), passed in 2018. The state plan also focuses on controlled burns and thinned forests instead of fire suppression in tandem with more wildland fire-fighting capacity and community engagement around fire adaptation.

“We have on-the-ground proof that [this strategy] does work to help keep fires less severe, to return forests to a more historically resilient state,” says Will Rubin of the Department of Natural Resources.

Washington’s 20-year plan flagged 39 “priority areas”, including the Colville reservation, Gifford Pinchot and Okanogan-Wenatchee national forests, which are most in need of fire interventions. The state aims to intervene in 1.25 million acres of fire-prone landscapes by 2037. About half of those acres are on federal lands, [which the state can co-manage](#) through partnerships. There are more than 400,000 acres of overlap between these priority areas and approximately 250,000 acres of fire sheds the Forest Service prioritized based on fire susceptibility and how damaging fire could be to lives or property. While DNR identified priority areas across the state, the Forest Service plan focuses on the Central and Eastern Washington areas it found most vulnerable.

[According to DNR](#), as of 2020, more than 1.3 million acres of national forest system land in Eastern Washington were identified as in need of treatment. Also according to the department, 166,000 acres of agency-managed land and 74,000 acres of “other state-owned lands” in Eastern Washington are due for treatment.

The Forest Service, part of Department of Agriculture, is currently coordinating with regional partners in Washington and Oregon, including state agencies and tribes, to determine strategies to implement work

over the next decade, says Stephen Baker, regional media officer of the USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest region, via email.

More resources are needed

But even a plan with funding faces hurdles.

There is a nationwide struggle to hire enough people to fight fires. While the new funding should help the Forest Service invest in a better-paid and larger firefighting workforce, with the aim of making more than 1,000 seasonal firefighting positions permanent, firefighters can't appear from thin air.

"We've been talking for years about the need to increase the workforce — including a trained prescribed fire workforce — to perform this critical work," The Nature Conservancy's Batura says.

In Washington's forest health plan, the state included steps to increase that workforce by starting restoration training programs through Washington State University. Other training programs exist, but "they're very small," Franz says, emphasizing the importance of working with educational programs from high school forward to create a natural resources workforce.

Anderson hazards that it's not just firefighters overwhelmed by fire.

"It's worth keeping in mind how hard [adaptation] is for communities," he said. The burnout rate is starting to get pretty high. I would allow room for working with trauma impacted communities."

And there's still more funding needed to treat forests and gird communities against the worst impacts of fire.

Between 2014 and 2019, the state spent nearly \$150 million [on average](#) annually on firefighting, with the record fire season of 2015 running \$342 million in firefighting costs alone. In June 2021, The Nature Conservancy estimated the U.S. would need [\\$5 billion to \\$6 billion at minimum per year](#) to treat the highest-priority forests and prepare communities for fire over the next decade.

There are 2.8 million acres of forest just in central Eastern Washington that are already dead or dying, Franz says, and the amount of forest in decline increases every year as insects, disease and climate change compound forest health problems.

Details of the plan also still need to be fleshed out.

"We should have more of these specifics — like number of acres, priority focus areas, funding amounts, timing, etc — to share in the next few weeks," the Forest Service's Baker says.

But Washington is in a position to put available funding into action more quickly, sources suggest.

The early stage of the federal plan involves one to two years of engaging local leadership. Franz says the state and the U.S. forest health teams have been meeting in regularly since last year, and she says she has received positive feedback on these communications.

"We are well ahead of making the plan that they just adopted in the investments they're bringing with it a reality," Franz said.

As of the end of October 2021, DNR and its partners have tracked treatments across 363,000 acres of state, federal, private and tribal lands, Rubin says, putting the state at nearly 30% of the way toward reaching its 1.25 million-acre treatment goal.

"I truly believe, when you put our plan and the funding we've secured ... coupled with now the federal plan and their significant investment of over \$655 million annually to this area that we are we are going to

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| | make significant progress and actually change the trajectory of our forests that are dying and change the trajectory of these catastrophic fires,” Franz says. |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Military hospital support to FEMA |
| SOURCE | https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/coronavirus/military-hospital-support-to-fema-will-begin-in-massachusetts-then-expand/ |
| GIST | <p>At the request of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), about 90 military medical personnel — including doctors, nurses, and respiratory therapists — are continuing to deploy in six teams to three states to support civilian health care workers treating COVID-19 patients.</p> <p>“U.S. Army North’s priority remains defense of the homeland, which includes the ongoing, whole-of-government fight against the COVID-19 pandemic,” Army Lt. Gen. John R. Evans Jr., Army North commander, said. “It is a team effort — the Department of Defense is one of many federal agencies providing assistance — and I am thankful and proud of our service members’ role in this endeavor.”</p> <p>The Defense Department support is beginning in Massachusetts and expanding to Arizona and Maine.</p> <p>In Massachusetts, one 15-person team from the Air Force will support Signature Healthcare Brockton Hospital in Brockton, while another 15-person Air Force team will support Lawrence General Hospital in Lawrence.</p> <p>In Arizona, one 15-person team from the Navy will support Canyon Vista Medical Center in Sierra Vista, while another 15-person Navy team will support Valleywise Health Medical Center in Phoenix. These teams join a team supporting a hospital in Yuma.</p> <p>In Maine, two 15-person teams from the Air Force will support Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center in Bangor. These teams join a team supporting a hospital in Lewiston.</p> <p>In addition, the joint DOD effort currently or will soon include 30 teams working in 18 states: one in California, three in Connecticut, one in Indiana, two in Louisiana, one in Maryland, three in Michigan, one in Minnesota, one in Missouri, one in New Hampshire, one in New Jersey, one in New Mexico, five in New York, two in Ohio, two in Oklahoma, two in Pennsylvania, one in Rhode Island, one in Texas, one in Wisconsin, and one in the Navajo Nation.</p> <p>Army North, under U.S. Northern Command’s oversight, provides operational command of the teams.</p> <p>On Dec. 30, 2021, the secretary of defense approved the activation of 1,000 military medical personnel to support the federal government’s COVID-19 response. Five hundred of the 1,000 were made available to support requests for federal support on Jan. 15, 2022. The other 500 became available at the end of the month.</p> <p>These 1,000 personnel join about 400 other military medical personnel, previously activated to assist civilian hospitals.</p> <p>Most of the personnel helping with the FEMA effort are from the recently assigned additional forces. In total, more than 570 of the 1,000 additional forces are supporting, or will soon support, hospitals.</p> |
| Return to Top | Read the announcement at the Department of Defense |

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Governors justify changes despite CDC |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/13/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#covid-mask-mandates-governors |

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| GIST | <p>The governors of Maryland and New Jersey defended their moves to ease Covid restrictions, saying on Sunday that falling coronavirus cases in their states justified a change even as new cases and deaths remain fairly high in some regions of the United States.</p> <p>“As best we can tell right now this thing is going from pandemic to endemic, and we feel it is the responsible step to take,” Gov. Phil Murphy of New Jersey said on CBS’s “Face the Nation,” referring to the stage when the virus will become a manageable part of daily life. He is one of several Democratic governors who announced plans to lift statewide mask mandates last week, as the highly transmissible Omicron variant loosens its grip on the United States.</p> <p>According to many health experts, the pandemic’s next phase may depend on the emergence of new variants, vaccination rates and risk tolerance. Herd immunity to Covid, public health specialists say, is unlikely to be achieved. And scientists have cautioned that protection may wane over time, and future variants may be better able to sidestep our defenses.</p> <p>Still, known coronavirus infections are falling across the United States, though case numbers nationwide have not dropped to pre-Omicron levels and remain high in states like Alaska, Mississippi and West Virginia. Hospitalizations and deaths are also on the decline, but remain elevated.</p> <p>Governor Murphy’s optimistic tone echoed that of Larry Hogan, Maryland’s Republican governor, who has called on his state’s Board of Education to lift its school mask mandate. Governor Hogan removed Maryland’s state masking requirement last May, but the schools are governed independently. “I think it’s safe enough for our kids to just try to get back to normal,” he said on CNN’s “State of the Union.”</p> <p>This week, the head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky, reiterated her agency’s position that masks should not be removed when gathering indoors. “We are not there yet,” she said at a White House briefing on Wednesday.</p> <p>As cases drop and restrictions lift, Dr. Scott Gottlieb, the former head of the Food and Drug Administration, said he thought the country seemed to be shifting away from a period of collective actions to protect vulnerable groups, and toward one where individuals must protect themselves based on their own risk assessments.</p> <p>“I think there’s portions of the population that are going to be in a very difficult spot right now because they remain vulnerable,” Dr. Gottlieb said on “Face the Nation.”</p> <p>Young children, he said, are one of those groups, referring to the F.D.A.’s announcement on Friday to postpone its decision about whether to authorize Pfizer-BioNTech’s vaccine for children under 5 until more data becomes available. Studies so far have found that two doses are not sufficient to protect children ages 2 to 4, though in April the company expects to have data on the efficacy of a third dose.</p> <p>Dr. Gottlieb, who serves on Pfizer’s board, said the latest delay, which affects nearly 18 million children and their families, was frustrating. But he said the F.D.A.’s decision was prudent. By waiting, “they’ll have a very firm picture of what level of effectiveness the vaccine is delivering,” he said. “That is important for patients and pediatricians to make fully informed decisions.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Officials: surge in fake pop-up testing sites |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/13/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#fake-pop-up-testing-sites-proliferated-in-the-us-as-demand-soared-officials-say |
| GIST | With the surge in cases fueled by the Omicron variant came a surge in the demand for coronavirus tests — and right behind it, a surge in accusations of fraud and warnings to U.S. consumers about dodgy coronavirus testing locations. |

“Throughout California, fake testing sites are sprouting up to exploit families and individuals seeking Covid tests,” Rob Bonta, the attorney general of California, [said in a statement](#) last month.

Attorneys general in New Mexico, New York, Massachusetts, Oregon, Florida, Minnesota, California, Illinois, Colorado and Washington have all shut down or sued testing sites in recent weeks.

One thing that illegitimate test-site operators may be after is patients’ personal information, like credit card numbers, driver’s license data and Social Security numbers, which can be used afterward for identity theft or unsolicited online purchases. They may try to bill governments for tests they claim were provided to uninsured people, or charge consumers fees for tests that were supposed to be provided free, and then deliver made-up results or none at all.

“It is important for people to know that these sites are not licensed or regulated by a government agency, and they should ask questions before visiting a pop-up testing location — or try to utilize a state-sponsored testing site,” Kwame Raoul, the attorney general of Illinois, [advised in a statement in January](#).

The Federal Trade Commission’s website offers [guidelines on how to avoid being fooled by fake testing sites](#). The commission recommends that people who are seeking a test get a referral from a health care provider, instead of trusting any site they happen to come across. Another tip is to check whether a site is listed on the local health department’s website. Consumers can also ask their local police department or sheriff’s office, which should know about all legitimate, locally approved testing sites.

The Department of Health and Human Services’ [inspector general recommends](#) being wary of any testing site that requests financial or medical information to perform a free test.

One prominent case of fraud accusations involves a Chicago-based company, Center for Covid Control, which opened some 300 pop-up locations across the country and [collected up to 10,000 samples a day](#). The F.B.I. and other federal agencies, including the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, are investigating the company and its partner lab, Doctors Clinical Laboratory, following complaints from former employees and members of the public.

The company and the lab are also being investigated by attorneys general in a number of states, including [Illinois](#), Oregon, [Washington](#), Arizona, [Minnesota](#) and Massachusetts.

The attorney general of Illinois, Mr. Raoul, [wrote in a statement](#) that complaints about the company had ranged “from testing results being delayed or not received at all, to results being provided to individuals who were never administered a test, to tests being stored improperly, and staff incorrectly using P.P.E. and face masks.”

Center for Covid Control announced in late January that all of its testing sites would be closed until further notice. The company said in a brief statement that had been posted on its website that it would provide additional training to its employees on sample collection, customer service and compliance with regulatory guidelines. The statement did not directly address the accusations against the company, and the website is no longer functioning.

Center for Covid Control representatives did not respond to repeated messages seeking comment for this article.

Attorney General Keith Ellison of Minnesota [filed suit against the company and the lab](#) on Jan. 19, accusing them of “deceiving consumers.” [In a news release](#), Mr. Ellison cited accusations from former employees that test samples were stored improperly and neglected for days, and that managers instructed them to falsify sample receipt dates and to lie to patients about results, saying they were negative or inconclusive when the samples had actually never been tested.

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| | <p>A suit filed by the attorney general of Washington, Bob Ferguson, accuses the company of fraudulently billing the federal government for more than \$124 million for testing supposedly uninsured patients, many of whom had health insurance.</p> <p>“Center for Covid Control contributed to the spread of Covid-19 when it provided false negative results,” Mr. Ferguson said in a statement. “These sham testing centers threatened the health and safety of our communities.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Remote island nation faces 1st Covid case |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/13/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#a-remote-island-nation-confronts-its-first-confirmed-coronavirus-case |
| GIST | <p>The Cook Islands, the South Pacific nation known for its strict isolation policy, was among the last countries with no reported coronavirus cases. On Saturday, Prime Minister Mark Brown announced on social media that a traveler who visited from New Zealand had tested positive after returning from the islands.</p> <p>The traveler, who is fully vaccinated, spent eight days in the Cook Islands and developed symptoms the morning of Feb. 7, before departing from the Cooks’ largest island, Rarotonga, according to a government news release issued on Saturday. This could suggest that there is “silent transmission” of the virus in the Cook Islands, the release said, meaning that people may become infected and spread the virus without realizing it.</p> <p>The Cook Islands is a self-governing chain of 15 islands in free association with New Zealand. Most of its population of about 17,000 lives on Rarotonga.</p> <p>Mr. Brown said it was “very likely” that the person had contracted the virus in Rarotonga. The government shared the names of a restaurant and a nightclub the infected person had visited, based on information from an official contact-tracing system, and asked that citizens who had been at those places around the same time and had developed “flu-like symptoms” come forward for testing.</p> <p>Later on Saturday, the country’s health ministry said in a news release that 31 potential close contacts of the infected traveler had received P.C.R. tests, and that all of the results had come back negative.</p> <p>The announcement comes a month after the country reopened its air borders to vaccinated visitors, allowing for two-way quarantine-free travel from New Zealand. Previously, the Cook Islands had maintained a stringent travel policy, shutting itself off from the world in early 2020 out of fear that a Covid-19 outbreak would overpower its health care system, opening to New Zealand only for a brief period in 2021.</p> <p>This was a strategy favored by the governments of many Pacific island countries, including Kiribati, Tonga, Palau, the Solomon Islands and Samoa, during the first two years of the pandemic. Their geographic isolation, strict travel restrictions and high vaccination rates allowed them to keep viral transmission low or even remain virtually coronavirus-free.</p> <p>Now, some of these countries have started to gradually reopen to travelers and are enduring surges in caseloads driven by the highly transmissible Omicron variant. In Tonga, the government declared a countrywide lockdown in early February amid a growing outbreak that started among aid workers helping the country recover from a volcanic eruption and tsunami.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Swiss approve ban on public tobacco ads |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/13/world/europe/switzerland-tobacco-ad-ban.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News |

ZURICH — Advertisements glamorizing cigarettes will soon be a thing of the past in Switzerland, after voters on Sunday overwhelmingly approved legislation forbidding tobacco companies from displaying them in public spaces.

Health advocates have said that the legislation, which was approved in a referendum, was a significant step toward tightening the country's loose tobacco regulations.

"Many organizations have stepped up to the plate and advocated for a solution that prioritizes youth protection," said Flavia Wasserfallen, a member of the Swiss National Council and a proponent of the initiative.

Across much of the West, tobacco advertisements long ago fell out of favor, but they have lived on in this Alpine nation, with displays for cigarettes and e-cigarettes showing up on billboards, in movie theaters and at events like music festivals.

But voters made it clear on Sunday that they were no longer interested in seeing them, and despite strong opposition from the tobacco industry and the government, the tougher regulations were approved by 56.6 percent of voters and received strong support from the country's French- and Italian-speaking regions, despite having the country's highest smoking rates.

Steps have been taken in recent years to try to introduce tougher regulations on tobacco-related products in Switzerland. In 2015, the Federal Council, the country's executive branch, proposed a Tobacco Products Act that would ban the sale of tobacco and related goods to minors as well as restrict advertising.

Parliament eventually approved a weakened version of the bill, which forbade the sale of tobacco to those under 18 but let advertising continue mostly unimpeded.

The most recent initiative was started by a group of more than 40 health organizations that formed in response to the weakening of the tobacco legislation. The revamped Tobacco Products Act, which includes the advertising-related provisions that voters approved on Sunday, is expected to come into effect in 2023.

"The majority of our country has decided to correct Parliament's decision on the Tobacco Products Act," Hans Stöckli, who serves as the president of the committee behind the initiative, said on Sunday. Mr. Stöckli described the result as "a historic milestone" and as "a necessary step" toward improved tobacco regulation.

Opponents of the measure called the tighter restrictions extreme. And while they agreed that tobacco should be age-restricted, they said that the new rules amounted to a de facto ban on a legal product because children could potentially be exposed to advertisements anywhere.

Switzerland has long had a close relationship with the tobacco industry. Philip Morris and Japan Tobacco International have their international headquarters in the country, and British American Tobacco also has a strong presence.

The industry employs about 4,500 people in Switzerland, according to the government, including in the production of high-tar cigarettes that are illegal to produce or sell in the European Union. Cigarettes rank with chocolate and cheese as some of the country's leading exports.

Even after the new rules take effect, Switzerland will continue to have more liberal tobacco regulations than many other countries. And it will also still not fulfill all of the requirements needed to ratify the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, an international response to combating the tobacco epidemic, despite signing it in 2004. The United States has also not ratified the convention.

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| | <p>Alain Berset, Switzerland's vice president, who also serves as the country's health minister, had opposed the initiative before the vote. But at a news conference on Sunday, he acknowledged that Swiss voters had spoken, and said that the government would move forward with the new regulations.</p> <p>"The Federal Council will now tackle the implementation of the initiative," Mr. Berset said.</p> <p>The Tobacco Products Act was not the only issue on the ballot on Sunday. In a move that people feared could have cut Switzerland off from global medical progress, voters shot down a proposed ban on all human and animal experiments in the country.</p> <p>Voters also decided against providing Swiss media outlets with increased financial support, by rejecting a government proposal to extend subsidies to online media as well as to regional radio and television stations.</p> <p>A government-approved amendment to the federal stamp duties act that would have made it cheaper for companies to raise new capital was also rejected, with opponents saying it would have mainly benefited large companies.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Average gas price spikes \$.15 to \$3.55/gal |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/13/average-us-gas-price-spikes-15-cents-over-3-weeks-/ |
| GIST | <p>CAMARILLO, Calif. — The average U.S. price of a gallon of regular-grade gasoline spiked 15 cents over the past three weeks to \$3.55 per gallon.</p> <p>Industry analyst Trilby Lundberg of the Lundberg Survey said Sunday that the price jump came after a rise in crude oil costs.</p> <p>Nationwide, the highest average price for regular-grade gas is in the San Francisco Bay Area, at \$4.75 per gallon. The lowest average is in Houston, at \$3.05 per gallon.</p> <p>According to the survey, the average price of diesel is \$3.91 a gallon, up 21 cents over three weeks.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/14 Hong Kong faces Covid 'onslaught' |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/14/covid-onslaught-has-overwhelmed-hong-kongs-capacity-as-cases-surge-leader-says |
| GIST | <p>Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam has said an "onslaught" of Covid-19 infections has dealt a heavy blow and overwhelmed capacity to deal with the virus as daily cases surge to record highs.</p> <p>Daily infections have multiplied by a factor of 13 over the past two weeks, from about 100 cases at the start of February to more than 1,300 on 13 February, with authorities scrambling to control the deepening outbreak.</p> <p>Lam on Monday said her government would coordinate with Chinese officials to tackle the "aggravating situation" after China said it would help the city with testing, treatment and quarantine.</p> <p>"The onslaught of the fifth wave of the epidemic has dealt a heavy blow to Hong Kong and overwhelmed the city's capacity of handling," she said, adding that the surge had lengthened the amount of time before infected patients could access isolation facilities.</p> <p>"The situation is highly undesirable and the government feels worried and sorry about it."</p> <p>Her top officials would coordinate with the central government to enhance Hong Kong's testing and isolation facilities, and secure resources from rapid antigen kits and protective gear to fresh vegetables, she said.</p> |

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| | <p>The Chinese territory reported 1,347 new infections on Sunday, down from Saturday's record, but the spread with 2,000 more suspected cases threatens its overstretched healthcare system, authorities said.</p> <p>Medical experts warn the city could see 28,000 daily infections by the end of March, with the unvaccinated elderly a particular worry.</p> <p>Hospital beds for Covid-19 patients in the global financial hub are already at 90% occupancy, data from the city's Hospital Authority showed, while isolation facilities are also near full capacity.</p> <p>Hong Kong is prioritising elderly, children and those in serious conditions in hospitals, said Larry Lee, chief manager at the city's Hospital Authority.</p> <p>Lam said authorities would "spare no effort" to implement the "dynamic zero" coronavirus infection strategy in Hong Kong, which, like mainland China, seeks to curb outbreaks as soon as they occur, in contrast with many other places that are trying to live with Covid.</p> <p>Hong Kong has recorded about 24,000 infections and more than 200 deaths, less than other similar major cities.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/14 Mauritius challenges UK islands claim |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/14/mauritius-formally-challenges-britains-ownership-of-chagos-islands |
| GIST | <p>Britain's ownership of the Chagos archipelago has been formally challenged after the Mauritian ambassador to the UN, Jagdish Koonjul, raised his country's flag above the atoll of Peros Banhos.</p> <p>In a ceremony on Monday at 10.30am local time, Mauritian officials sang their country's national anthem and the red, blue, yellow and green standard was raised up the flagpole.</p> <p>Koonjul said: "We are performing the symbolic act of raising the flag as the British have done so many times to establish colonies. We, however, are reclaiming what has always been our own."</p> <p>A pre-recorded message by the Mauritian prime minister, Pravind Jugnauth, was broadcast on a speaker to the Chagossians, Mauritian officials and media assembled on the beach.</p> <p>"This is the first time Mauritius has led an expedition to this part of its territory," he said. "I feel sad that I have not been able to be part of this historic visit.</p> <p>"I'm delighted that our Chagossian brothers and sisters are able to travel to their birthplace without any foreign [ie British] escort.</p> <p>"The message I wish to give out to the world, as the state with sovereignty over the Chagos archipelago, is that we will ensure a wise stewardship of its territory – over its maritime security, conservation of the marine environment and human rights, notably the return of those of Chagossian origin."</p> <p>A metal plaque secured beneath the flagpole said: "Visit of the Mauritius delegation to Peros Banhos archipelago, Republic of Mauritius, in the context of the scientific survey of Blenheim Reef."</p> <p>In a phone call to the Guardian shortly after the flag was raised, the Mauritian prime minister said: "This is a very emotional moment for me and a very historic time for us because we are able to raise our flag on our own territory.</p> <p>"This is the first time Mauritius has led an expedition to this part of its territory," he said. "I feel sad that I have not been able to be part of this historic visit.</p> |

“I’m delighted that our Chagossian brothers and sisters are able to travel to their birthplace without any foreign [ie British] escort.

“The message I wish to give out to the world, as the state with sovereignty over the Chagos archipelago, is that we will ensure a wise stewardship of its territory – over its maritime security, conservation of the marine environment and human rights, notably the return of those of Chagossian origin.”

A metal plaque secured beneath the flagpole said: “Visit of the Mauritius delegation to Peros Banhos archipelago, Republic of Mauritius, in the context of the scientific survey of Blenheim Reef.”

In a phone call to the Guardian shortly after the flag was raised, the Mauritian prime minister said: “This is a very emotional moment for me and a very historic time for us because we are able to raise our flag on our own territory.

“The international community and international institutions have already decided that this is our territory. What we are doing is legitimate.”

Asked what would happen if UK officials later removed the Mauritian flag, Jugnauth said: “I don’t know what they are going to do. If they remove the flag, this will amount to a provocation on their part. The UK is not abiding by international law judgments.”

After the ceremony, the crew of the cruise ship Bleu de Nîmes, chartered by Mauritius, arranged a barbecue on the beach.

Wifi communications from the ship have been disrupted for the past 24 hours. Another vessel was seen nearby. It was not clear whether this was a UK-owned fisheries protection ship.

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Pierce Co. low on sheriff’s deputies |
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| SOURCE | https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article258316753.html |
| GIST | <p>Pierce County is considering a \$10,000 bonus for all its sheriff’s deputies to encourage more applicants and higher retention rates.</p> <p>The Sheriff’s Department is short 46 funded deputy positions, and the sheriff expects more than 50 departures this year.</p> <p>Pierce County Executive Bruce Dammeier(R-Puyallup) wrote a letter to the County Council on Thursday, proposing a \$4 million budget increase to attract new applicants and retain deputies on the force.</p> <p>“The challenges of serving in law enforcement have never been greater and many are considering retirement, transferring to jurisdictions with higher pay, or choosing different careers with less danger and stress,” Dammeier wrote the council.</p> <p>The County Council approves the county budget and adjustments. Council Chair Derek Young (D-Gig Harbor) said he is interested in learning more about the \$10,000 retention incentive. The council has yet to decide whether to bring the proposal forward for a vote.</p> <p>“We are happy to listen, and there are a lot of factors that go into this,” Young said.</p> <p>Sheriff Ed Troyer hopes the council passes the budget expense for the 350-deputy department. “I think the \$10,000 per deputy shows the county government’s support of the sheriff’s department and the dangerous work that our deputies do day in and day out,” he said in an email.</p> <p>If action is taken to address the dearth of deputies, Young believes more should be done for the staffing shortages in other county departments.</p> |

“The sheriff’s department isn’t the only department having employment shortages,” he said.

So far, other financial incentives have not been enough of a draw to cover the sheriff’s staffing deficiency. The department currently offers law enforcement officers across Washington a bonus of \$15,000 to sign on in Pierce County, Troyer said. Last year was a five-year high in departures when 36 deputies left the department.

While all parties agree that there is a shortage of deputies, there are disagreements on why.

Dammeier also asked for council members to sign onto a letter to the state Legislature, calling for revisions to a 2021 police reform bill that he sees as the reason for an uptick in crime. According to the Washington State Legislature’s House Bill 1310, officers may only resort to physical force when there’s probable cause to make an arrest, prevent an escape or protect against an imminent threat of harm.

“Well-intentioned but ill-conceived changes to state law have prevented police from protecting the public in many circumstances. It is not coincidental that homicides, property crimes, assault, and traffic fatalities have dramatically increased over the last year,” Dammeier’s letter to the council said.

Troyer said deputies the department has trained and put through academy are moving to other states and other jobs because of the “anti-police” movement. He blames last year’s law enforcement bills for the shortages.

“With legislative changes, it is taking deputies longer to investigate and resolve calls. This is having an impact on getting to calls timely and what effect we have when we do arrive,” Troyer said.

Some officials disagree, saying that this follows the current national trend of staffing departures called The Great Resignation.

“According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 4 million Americans quit their jobs in July 2021,” the Harvard Business review reported in September. “Resignations peaked in April and have remained abnormally high for the last several months, with a record-breaking 10.9 million open jobs at the end of July.”

The staffing shortages were a problem for the department before the law enforcement reform bills passed last year, Young said.

“We have an aging workforce, and we have struggled to hold on to people for years,” he said. “(The bills) have exacerbated the issue, but it isn’t all due to recent events.”

Troyer confirmed that there have been more retirements but believes they are due to a department demoralized from the reform bills.

“There are people retiring, however, there are a large number of people who are retiring before they normally would, some are resigning and leaving law enforcement work all together and some others are leaving for other agencies in or out of state,” Troyer said.

Even if all of the funded positions are filled, Troyer said, there is a further need to add more staff. A 2016 staffing study concluded Pierce County needed to add 66 commissioned personnel to the department. Since the study, County Council has budgeted about half of the study’s recommended staffing size, Troyer said.

Dammeier, Young and Troyer said details of the potential retention bonus need to be discussed with labor unions.

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Quiet flight of Muslims from France |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/13/world/europe/france-election-muslims-islam-macron-zemmour-le-pen-pecresse.html |
| GIST | <p>PARIS — France’s wounded psyche is the invisible character in every one of Sabri Louatah’s novels and the hit television series he wrote. He speaks of his “sensual, physical, visceral love” for the French language and of his attachment to his hometown in southeastern France, bathed in its distinctive light. He closely monitors the campaign for the upcoming presidential elections.</p> <p>But Mr. Louatah does all of that from Philadelphia, the city that he began considering home after the 2015 attacks in France by Islamist extremists, which killed scores of people and deeply traumatized the country. As sentiments hardened against all French Muslims, he no longer felt safe there. One day, he was spat on and called, “Dirty Arab.”</p> <p>“It’s really the 2015 attacks that made me leave because I understood they were not going to forgive us,” said Mr. Louatah, 38, the grandson of Muslim immigrants from Algeria. “When you live in a big Democratic city on the East Coast, you’re more at peace than in Paris, where you’re deep in the cauldron.”</p> <p>Ahead of elections in April, President Emmanuel Macron’s top three rivals — who are expected to account for nearly 50 percent of the vote, according to polls — are all running anti-immigrant campaigns that fan fears of a nation facing a civilizational threat by invading non-Europeans. The issue is top of their agenda, even though France’s actual immigration lags behind that of most other European countries.</p> <p>The problem barely discussed is emigration. For years, France has lost highly educated professionals seeking greater dynamism and opportunity elsewhere. But among them, according to academic researchers, is a growing number of French Muslims who say that discrimination was a strong push factor and that they felt compelled to leave by a glass ceiling of prejudice, nagging questions about their security and a feeling of not belonging.</p> <p>The outflow has gone unremarked upon by politicians and the news media even as researchers say it shows France’s failure to provide a path for advancement for even the most successful of its largest minority group, a “brain drain” of those who could have served as models of integration.</p> <p>“These people end up contributing to the economy of Canada or Britain,” said Olivier Esteves, a professor at the University of Lille’s center on political science, public law and sociology, which surveyed 900 French Muslim émigrés and conducted in-depth interviews with 130 of them. “France is really shooting itself in the foot.”</p> <p>French Muslims, estimated at 10 percent of the population, occupy a strangely outsize place in the campaign — even if their actual voices are seldom heard. It is not only an indication of the lingering wounds inflicted by the attacks of 2015 and 2016, which killed hundreds, but also of France’s long struggle over identity issues and its unresolved relationship with its former colonies.</p> <p>They are being linked to crime or other social ills through dog-whistle expressions like “zones of non-France,” used by Valérie Pécresse, the center-right candidate now tied with the far-right leader, Marine Le Pen, for second place behind Mr. Macron. They are singled out for condemnation by the far-right television pundit and candidate Éric Zemmour, who has said that employers have the right to deny jobs to Black and Arab people.</p> <p>The tenor of the race has stoked dread as they watch it from abroad, say Mr. Louatah and others who have left, speaking with a mix of anger and resignation of their home country, where they still have family and other strong ties.</p> <p>The places he and others have settled, including Britain and the United States, are not paradises free of discrimination for Muslims or other minority groups, but those interviewed said they nevertheless felt greater opportunity and acceptance there. It was outside France that, for the first time, the simple fact that they are French was not questioned, some said.</p> |

“It’s only abroad that I’m French,” said Amar Mekrous, 46, who was raised in a Paris suburb by his immigrant parents. “I’m French, I’m married to a Frenchwoman, I speak French, I live French, I love French food and culture. But in my own country, I’m not French.”

Finding the suspicion surrounding French Muslims oppressive after the 2015 attacks, Mr. Mekrous settled with his wife and three children in Leicester, England.

In 2016, he created a Facebook group for French Muslims in Britain, which now has 2,500 members. Newcomers to Britain surged before Brexit, he said, adding that they were mostly young families and single mothers who found it difficult to find jobs in France because they wore the Muslim veil.

Only recently have academic researchers begun to form snapshots of French Muslims who have left. They include the research project into the emigration of French Muslims led by academics affiliated with the University of Lille, a leading French university, and the National Center for Scientific Research, the French government’s main research institution.

Separately, researchers at three other universities — the University of Liège and K.U. Leuven in Belgium, and the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands — have been working on a joint project looking at the emigration of Muslims from France, as well as from Belgium and the Netherlands.

Jérémy Mandin, a French researcher involved in the study at the University of Liège in Belgium, said that many young French Muslims had been disillusioned “that they had played by the rules, done everything that was asked of them, and ultimately been unable to lead a desirable life.”

Elyes Saafi, 37, a marketing executive at the London operations of StoneX, an American financial firm, grew up in Remiremont, a town in eastern France, where his parents settled after arriving from Tunisia in the 1970s. His father operated a spinning machine at a textile factory.

Like his own parents, Mr. Saafi ended up making a new life in a new country. In London, he met his wife, Mathilde, who is French, and found an easygoing diversity unimaginable in France.

“At corporate dinners, there might be a vegetarian buffet or a halal buffet, but everybody mingles,” he said. “The C.E.O. shows up and he has a turban on his head, and he mixes with his employees.”

The Saafis miss France, but they decided not to return partly because of worries about their 2-year-old son.

“In Britain, I’m not worried about raising an Arab child,” Ms. Saafi said.

In 2020, anti-Muslim acts in France rose 52 percent over the previous year, according to official complaints gathered by the government’s National Human Rights Commission. Incidents have risen in the past decade, rising sharply in 2015. A rare official investigation in 2017 found that young men perceived as Arab or Black were 20 times more likely to have their identities checked by the police.

In the workplace, job candidates with an Arab name had 32 percent less chance of being called for an interview, according to a government report released in November.

Despite her degrees in European law and project management, Myriam Grubo, 31, said she was never able to find a job in France. After a half-dozen years abroad — first in Geneva at the World Health Organization and then in Senegal at the Pasteur Institute of Dakar — she is back in Paris with her parents. She is looking for work — abroad.

“To feel like a stranger in my country is a problem,” she said, adding that she just “wanted to be left alone” to practice her faith.

Rama Yade, a junior minister for human rights during the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, said that France's denial of problems like police violence had made matters worse. She saw the current backlash in France against "wokisme" — or supposedly "woke" American ideas on social justice — as "nothing else but a pretext to no longer fight discrimination."

When Ms. Yade — born in Senegal in a Muslim family — was appointed a junior government minister in 2007, she believed it would be a "starting point." But after an unsuccessful bid for the presidency in 2017, she left for the United States.

"My glass ceiling was political," said Ms. Yade, 45, who is now senior director of Africa at the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based think tank.

To her, the presidential race's focus on immigration was the "consecration of 20 years of deterioration" in a political culture obsessed with national identity. She had quit her political party — for which Ms. Pécresse is now the candidate — because, Ms. Yade said, it had become "very hostile to anything that did not represent a fantasy version of French identity."

Mr. Louatah, the writer in Philadelphia, whose French wife is an economist and teaches at the University of Pennsylvania, said he hoped to return one day to the country that fills his novels. When the television series based on his work, "The Savages," was broadcast in 2019, it became an immediate hit for the company behind it, Canal Plus — and an unusual one, imagining France for the first time led by a president of North African descent.

But two years later, Mr. Louatah has come to view his series as an "anomaly." He began writing the second season, with a story line focusing on police violence, one of the most sensitive themes in France. Ultimately, "The Savages" was not renewed for reasons that he said were never made clear to him. A spokeswoman for Canal Plus said that the series had been planned for only one season.

In Philadelphia, he is writing a new novel that deals with exile from a country that is never named.

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Alaska search for plane ends; self-rescue |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/search-for-plane-in-alaska-ends-with-troopers-learning-pilot-self-rescued-days-earlier/ |
| GIST | <p>ANCHORAGE, Alaska — A small aircraft's emergency beacon activated early last week after the plane experienced a mechanical problem and overturned near Hatcher Pass, prompting an expansive, multiday search effort that ended with authorities learning that the pilot was safe — and had coordinated his own rescue days earlier, Alaska State Troopers said.</p> <p>Troopers first received the beacon transmission on Feb. 6 from what seemed to be an unidentifiable aircraft east of the Parks Highway, near Willow and Talkeetna, troopers said in an online report.</p> <p>Most modern emergency locators installed on planes include data in their transmissions about the plane and who it is registered to. But the transmission on this plane was an older-style beacon that didn't include any data except the general vicinity where it was coming from, troopers spokesman Austin McDaniel said Saturday.</p> <p>After troopers found no distress calls in the area or reports of overdue aircraft, multiple volunteers with the Civil Air Patrol searched for the plane over multiple days using special equipment to locate beacon transmissions, troopers said. Severe weather brought high winds and low visibility, challenging volunteers who also undertook a 13-hour ground search in their attempt to find the aircraft, according to troopers.</p> <p>The Alaska Army National Guard and Alaska Wildlife Troopers deployed helicopters to find the beacon, without success.</p> |

After four days of searching, Civil Air Patrol volunteer pilots located an overturned 1946 Taylorcraft BV12-D in the Lynx Peak area near Hatcher Pass on Thursday afternoon, according to troopers.

The Alaska Air National Guard flew a rescue team to the location, where the plane appeared to have been abandoned with no signs that anyone had been injured, troopers said. Footprints from the plane site led up the mountain but didn't indicate where the pilot may have gone after that, leading state and wildlife troopers to try to determine whether the pilot had coordinated his own extraction, according to troopers.

That evening, authorities were able to reach the pilot of that plane by phone, troopers said. The pilot, whom troopers did not identify in the report, told troopers his plane had run into mechanical problems during a flight Feb. 6, and he'd been forced to do a hard landing. He was able to contact another pilot who picked him up in a different plane, according to troopers.

Troopers notified the National Transportation Safety Board about the incident Thursday, McDaniel said. The plane's owner is working to remove the aircraft from the site near Lynx Peak, troopers said.

McDaniel said the Department of Public Safety in its press releases doesn't usually include the identities of people involved in search and rescue operations unless doing so would help them find the missing individuals; they've been charged with a crime; or, if they died in the incident, their next of kin have been notified.

Federal law requires pilots to report accidents or incidents to the nearest NTSB office, which McDaniel said the pilot did not do.

The incident was an example of how important it is for pilots to communicate with federal and state authorities when they're involved in any kind of accident with their aircraft, McDaniel said.

McDaniel encouraged recreational pilots to report incidents like this one to state troopers or NTSB even when they don't meet the threshold for federal reporting, "just to let folks know what's going on with that airplane."

"That way, we don't have a situation like this where we have, you know, multiple days of searching for (a beacon) activation that the pilot may not have been aware was even activated," McDaniel said.

The search efforts cost thousands of dollars and consumed hours of workers' and volunteers' time, he said.

"Our search and rescue mission can really be hampered when folks don't let us know that they self-rescued or made it out of the field," McDaniel said. "So always let us know that you've made it out safely."

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Key US-Canada bridge reopens |
| SOURCE | https://www.king5.com/article/news/nation-world/police-arrest-protesters-at-us-canada-bridge/507-7a8b9117-75d4-4ba6-b55d-94274ba5ba92 |
| GIST | <p>WINDSOR, ON — The busiest U.S.-Canada border crossing reopened late Sunday after protests against COVID-19 restrictions closed it for almost a week, while Canadian officials held back from a crackdown on a larger protest in the capital, Ottawa.</p> <p>Detroit International Bridge Co. said in a statement that "the Ambassador Bridge is now fully open allowing the free flow of commerce between the Canada and US economies once again." Esther Jentzen, spokeswoman for the company, said in a later text to The Associated Press that the bridge reopened to traffic at 11 p.m. EST.</p> |

The crossing normally carries 25% of all trade between the two countries, and the blockade on the Canadian side had disrupted business in both countries, with automakers forced to shut down several assembly plants.

Police in Windsor, Ontario, said earlier in the day that more than two dozen people had been peacefully arrested, seven vehicles towed and five seized as officers cleared the last demonstrators from near the bridge, which links the city — and numerous Canadian automotive plants — with Detroit.

The protest in Ottawa, meanwhile, has paralyzed downtown, infuriated residents who are fed up with police inaction and turned up pressure on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who presided at a Cabinet meeting late Sunday.

The demonstrations have reverberated across Canada and beyond, with similar convoys in France, New Zealand and the Netherlands. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security warned that truck convoys may be in the works in the United States.

The Ambassador Bridge had remained closed for most of the day despite the break up of the protest as a heavy snowstorm blanketed the area. Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens had said the span would open once authorities determined it was safe to do so.

Canada's industry minister, François-Philippe Champagne, welcomed the development, saying on Twitter: "Good news. Glad to see that the Ambassador Bridge is now reopened."

U.S. President Joe Biden's administration on Sunday acknowledged the seemingly peaceful resolution to the demonstration, which it said had "widespread damaging impacts" on the "lives and livelihoods of people" on both sides of the border.

"We stand ready to support our Canadian partners wherever useful in order to ensure the restoration of the normal free flow of commerce can resume," Homeland Security Advisor Dr. Liz Sherwood-Randall said in a statement.

In Ottawa, which is about 500 miles northeast of Windsor, Mayor Jim Watson said Sunday the city struck a deal with protesters who have jammed downtown streets for more than two weeks that will see them move out of residential areas in the next 24 hours.

Watson said he agreed to meet with demonstrators if they confined their protest to an area around Parliament Hill and moved their trucks and other vehicles out of residential neighborhoods by noon Monday.

The mayor shared a letter from one of the protest's organizers, Tamara Lich, in which she said demonstrators "agree with your request" to focus activities at Parliament Hill. But Lich later denied there was an agreement, saying in a tweet: "No deal has been made. End the mandates, end the passports. That is why we are here."

Watson added in his letter to protesters that residents are "exhausted" and "on edge" due to the demonstrations and warns that some businesses are teetering on the brink of permanent closure because of the disruptions.

The ranks of protesters had swelled to what police said were 4,000 demonstrators by Saturday, and a counter-protest of frustrated Ottawa residents attempting to block the convoy of trucks from entering the downtown emerged Sunday.

Clayton Goodwin, a 45-year-old military veteran who was among the counter-protesters, said it was time for residents to stand up against the protesters.

"I'm horrified that other veterans would be down there co-opting my flag, co-opting my service," said Goodwin, who is the CEO of the Veterans Accountability Commission, a nonprofit advocacy group. "It's a gift. The city was free. We're 92% vaccinated. We're ready to support our businesses."

Colleen Sinclair, another counter-protester, said the demonstrators have had enough time to have their discontent heard and need to move on -- with police force, if it comes down to it.

"They're occupiers. People are scared to go to work, too scared to leave their homes," she said. "This is not how you get your voice heard. This is domestic terrorism and we want you out of our city. Go home."

The city has seen similar expansions of the protest on past weekends, and loud music played as people milled about downtown where anti-vaccine demonstrators have been encamped since late January, to the frustration of local residents.

"It just feels like I'm living in a different country, like I'm in the States," said Shannon Thomas, a 32-year-old teacher. "It just makes me really sad to see all these people waving Canadian flags and acting like patriots when it's really the most sad and embarrassing thing I've ever seen."

Trudeau has so far rejected calls to use the military, but had said that "all options are on the table" to end the protests. Trudeau has called the protesters a "fringe" of Canadian society. Both federal and provincial politicians have said they can't order police what to do.

Major-General Steve Boivin, commander of Canadian Special Operations Forces Command, said Sunday that two of his special forces soldiers were supporting the protests in Ottawa and were in the "process of being released" from service. Boivin said the activity goes against the military's values and ethics.

On Friday, a judge ordered an end to the blockade at the crossing in Windsor and Ontario Premier Doug Ford declared a state of emergency allowing for fines of 100,000 Canadian dollars and up to one year in jail for anyone illegally blocking roads, bridges, walkways and other critical infrastructure.

Partial closures at the bridge started on Feb. 7 and by midweek the disruption was so severe that automakers began shutting down or reducing production. The standoff came at a time when the industry is already struggling to maintain production in the face of pandemic-induced shortages of computer chips and other supply-chain disruptions.

"We are protesting the government taking away our rights," said Windsor resident Eunice Lucas-Logan. "We want the restrictions removed. We have to wait to find out."

The 67-year-old has been out supporting the protest for the past four days. She said she appreciated that police have been patient.

On the other side of the country, a major truck border crossing between Surrey, British Columbia, and Blaine, Washington, was closed Sunday, a day after Canadian authorities said a few vehicles had breached police barricades and a crowd entered the area by foot.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police said Sunday afternoon four people had been arrested for "mischief" during the protest. Some people who stayed overnight had packed up and left, but the border crossing and roads in the area remained closed.

A border blockade that began in Coutts, Alberta, north of Sweet Grass, Montana, on Jan. 29 remained in place as well. Police issued more than 50 traffic tickets Saturday and continued issuing them Sunday, RCMP Cpl. Troy Savinkoff said.

Officers also intercepted and disabled three excavators that were being brought to the protest, Savinkoff said.

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| | <p>“Had those made their way to the blockade, it would only have compounded the unfortunate situation we’re facing at the border,” he said.</p> <p>While the protesters are decrying vaccine mandates for truckers and other COVID-19 restrictions, many of Canada's public health measures, such as mask rules and vaccine passports for getting into restaurants and theaters, are already falling away as the omicron surge levels off.</p> <p>About 90% of truckers in Canada are vaccinated, and trucker associations and many big-rig operators have denounced the protests. The U.S. has the same vaccination rule for truckers crossing the border, so it would make little difference if Trudeau lifted the restriction.</p> <p>Pandemic restrictions have been far stricter there than in the U.S., but Canadians have largely supported them. The vast majority of Canadians are vaccinated, and the COVID-19 death rate is one-third that of the United States.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Biden, in an interview with NBC’s Lester Holt on Sunday ahead of the Super Bowl, struck a critical tone when asked about those likely to object to the mask mandate at the NFL championship game.</p> <p>“I love how people talk about personal freedom,” he said. “If you’re exercising personal freedom, but you put someone else in jeopardy, their health in jeopardy, I don’t consider that being very good with freedom.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Ottawa 3rd week trucker occupation |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/13/world/americas/canada-trucker-protest.html |
| GIST | <p>OTTAWA — Canadian law enforcement officials said Sunday that they had reopened a major international bridge that protesters had been blockading for almost a week, raising hopes for industries the unrest had slowed to a near-standstill.</p> <p>As they announced that the Ambassador Bridge, which ties Windsor, Ontario, to Detroit, had been reclaimed after a series of arrests in the morning, some hailed it as a victory for a government shaken by the intransigence of anti-vaccine mandate protests that have mushroomed since they began.</p> <p>But in Canada’s capital, Ottawa, hundreds of truckers were entering their third week of occupation of the area around Parliament Hill, where they appeared to be emboldened by a growing sense of impunity.</p> <p>Late Sunday, the mayor of Ottawa, Jim Watson, revealed back-channel negotiations were underway with the truckers’ leadership to remove their convoy from residential neighborhoods, among other measures. The mayor’s office released an emailed letter dated Saturday from one of the protest leaders, Tamara Lich, in which she said, “We will be working hard over the next 24 hours to get buy in from the truckers.”</p> <p>The mayor said on Sunday in an interview that the conversations began several days ago, with the only concession offered to the truckers being an agreement to meet.</p> <p>The proposal would have the truckers leaving a residential area, where 15,000 people live, he said, but they would not be forced from Wellington Street, site of the legislative buildings.</p> <p>“My preoccupation has been to give some relief to the people who live in these areas,” he said. “It’s not the politicians or the truckers themselves who are suffering, it’s the people who live in these communities.”</p> <p>Word that tensions might ease a bit in the capital came after protesters and their supporters spent the weekend jamming the streets with dance parties, bonfires and even an inflatable hot tub. People swarmed local stores without masks, violating local regulations, and tossed gifts and cash to the truckers through the windows of the vehicles where they were encamped.</p> |

The slim ranks of police officers strolling through the occupation appeared to be largely standing by as people openly violated laws, such as carrying jugs of diesel fuel — forbidden supplies for the protesting truckers. Some of the truckers leaned on their horns.

In Windsor, a city on the edge of the Detroit River, at the southernmost heel of Ontario, the police took a more assertive stance.

Beginning Saturday morning, hundreds of officers staged a maneuver to rout the trucks that had been blocking the approaches to the Ambassador Bridge all week. Forming a human cordon, over the course of the day the police forced trucks off and pushed back protesters whose blockade of the major international trade route had cost American automakers, in particular, millions of dollars.

Late Sunday morning, the police said the remaining protesters had been largely cleared, with some arrested.

“Today, our national economic crisis at the Ambassador Bridge came to an end,” the mayor of Windsor, Drew Dilkens, declared.

In the hours after that announcement on Sunday morning, it was unclear whether his words might be more hopeful than warranted, given the scene at the bridge: Protesters were mostly gone — at least, for the moment — but all day Sunday the span remained idle.

Late Sunday, the bridge was officially reopened, according to the Canada Border Services Agency, after being plowed and salted, two days after the operation to drive back the protesters began.

“I know you guys are just doing your jobs, but you’re working for the wrong side,” one protester yelled at officers late Sunday as he left a busy intersection where the demonstrators had gathered, about a half mile from the foot of the Ambassador Bridge.

The authorities said the protesters had been repeatedly warned that they faced arrest. “Canada is a nation that believes in the right to freedom of speech and expression,” Mr. Dilkens said, “but we are also bound by the rule of law.”

The action of the police at the bridge contrasted sharply with their counterparts’ response in Ottawa, where hundreds of truckers have spent the past 18 days occupying the streets of Parliament Hill. Virtually unchecked by the police, they have cut off access to buildings that house the country’s Parliament, Supreme Court and even the prime minister’s office, their rumbling semis adding a brooding presence to the ordinarily placid city.

In recent days, the stage had seemingly been set for the police to act to end the trucker encampment. On Friday, Ontario’s premier, Doug Ford, declared a state of emergency, clearing the way for police to arrest occupiers and impose steep fines.

Other potential penalties piled up.

Truckers were threatened with the revocation of their licenses. And anyone aiding them, Mr. Ford warned, such as by supplying fuel, could also be arrested. Last week, a judge issued an injunction banning the cacophony of blasting horns that has been the occupation’s trademark day and night, acting after a resident filed suit on behalf of her neighbors.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, too, had also been hinting at a more forceful response after weeks of restraint in which he appeared to be trying to maintain a tenuous political balance. Late Sunday, Mr. Trudeau said that the government had held a meeting that “covered further actions the government can take to help end the blockades and occupations.”

Mr. Trudeau heads an unpopular minority government, and his reticence appeared to be an attempt to avoid turning the protests into a referendum on his leadership, which has the approval of only 42 percent of Canadians, and on pandemic policies that have polarized voters.

But if there is another shoe, it has yet to drop in Ottawa. Over the weekend, the protest only swelled, infusing the famously staid city with an air of anarchy for the third consecutive weekend.

“We are exercising our rights to peacefully protest; that’s why the police haven’t come down and raided us,” said Guy Meister, a trucker from Aylesford, Nova Scotia, who said he had spent nearly three weeks in his truck, parked across from the Senate building. “As far as illegal, they have to show me what’s illegal. How come I haven’t gotten a ticket yet? How come I am not in jail after three weeks?”

Mr. Meister offered an answer to his own question: “Deep down they know, yes, they can arrest us — but it’s a mistake.”

The police say that they are hamstrung by a lack of resources and that they are badly outnumbered. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Ontario Provincial Police opened a new command center on Saturday evening.

But the call a week ago by Ottawa’s police chief, Peter Sloly, for 1,800 more officers to bolster the city’s current rank of 1,200 appears to have so far gone largely unanswered: The force has received only about 250 mounted police officers, he said Thursday. The police did not respond to a request on Sunday for updated numbers.

From the protest’s start through Saturday, the police had made 26 arrests and doled out 2,600 tickets. There are 140 criminal investigations underway, the police said.

The mayor said that when municipal officers had tried to issue tickets, they had at times been swarmed by protesters and needed a police escort, which the city lacks the staff to provide.

Even with their resources limited, critics say, the police could be doing much more.

“We got them the additional help, but we really need them to enforce the law and uphold the law,” Bill Blair, the minister of emergency preparedness, told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation on Sunday. “Ultimately, this is the responsibility of the police — to enforce and uphold our laws — and we just need them to do it.”

In fact, in some respects the biggest concrete resistance the occupiers have faced to date has come not from law enforcement but from ordinary citizens who over the weekend organized a counterprotest, getting out the word over Facebook pages normally concerned with dog-walking and barbecues.

They begged the truckers to go home.

“It feels like a bad dream that has lasted for two weeks,” said Suzanne Charest, 58, one of the marchers.

On Sunday, some returned for a second counterprotest in which they formed a human blockade to try to turn back a convoy of truck drivers intent on making an incursion into the city’s downtown core.

With few exceptions, “all levels of government,” she lamented, “have really abandoned the people of Ottawa.”

The unrest was not limited to Ottawa and Windsor, though.

Other protests were continuing in at least a dozen Canadian cities, drawing crowds of varying sizes. As of 5 p.m. on Sunday, the Canada Border Services Agency reported that the border crossings remained closed at Emerson in the province of Manitoba, north of North Dakota, and at Coutts, where the province of

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| | Alberta borders Montana. At the Pacific Highway crossing between Washington State and Surrey, British Columbia, the border remained closed as of Sunday evening. |
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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Ukraine president tries to avert panic |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/13/world/europe/ukraine-russia-zelensky.html |
| GIST | <p>KYIV, Ukraine — Russian attack helicopters were spotted buzzing within miles of his country’s borders on Sunday. The last strands of diplomacy were unraveling. Allies evacuated their embassies, airlines canceled flights, and a large number of private jets departed from the capital.</p> <p>For Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine’s president and a former comedic actor who was elected three years ago on a message of optimism about his country’s relations with Russia — something that now seems a distant memory — room for maneuver narrowed over the weekend to a tiny selection of uncertain options.</p> <p>During a phone call on Sunday with President Biden, Mr. Zelensky issued an invitation for a visit, so the American president could “contribute to de-escalation” with his presence in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital. The United States has already ordered most American diplomats to leave, making a presidential visit unlikely.</p> <p>“I am convinced that your arrival in Kyiv in the coming days, which are crucial for stabilizing the situation, will be a powerful signal,” Mr. Zelensky said, according to an official Ukrainian account of the conversation, adding that the Ukrainian capital was “safe and under reliable protection.”</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky also thanked Mr. Biden for American support, including airlifts of armaments, and said, “We hope that, among other things, it will help prevent the spread of panic.”</p> <p>What is perhaps Europe’s most intense security crisis since the end of the Cold War appears to be nearing a climax, with Washington warning that a Russian invasion of Ukraine could begin at any moment. But the 44-year-old Ukrainian president is clinging to the strategy he has pursued for months, using every appearance to caution against panic and overreaction, to the point of seeming nearly delusional about the grave risks his country faces.</p> <p>From early in his presidency, Mr. Zelensky was seen as a novice playing a high-stakes game with a shrewd and experienced opponent, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia. And gaps have opened with allies in recent weeks as Mr. Biden and leaders of Europe’s great powers have raised a global alarm, treating the threat of an invasion much more seriously than Mr. Zelensky has publicly.</p> <p>Mr. Zelensky has remained engaged in diplomacy even as no clear path to a settlement is in focus, while instructing his military to signal, as it said in a statement over the weekend, that Ukraine is “absolutely ready to fight.”</p> <p>Adhering to a disciplined public relations strategy has been a hallmark of Mr. Zelensky’s tenure, seen as springing from the background he and important aides share in the entertainment industry.</p> <p>Supporters say he has little choice but to project calm whatever the circumstances, lest Ukrainians make runs on banks or grocery stores.</p> <p>Ukraine is now nearly surrounded by Russian and Russian-backed forces on a high level of readiness, with the start of Russian naval exercises on the Black Sea on Sunday completing the noose in the south. Russian officials have said they do not intend to invade Ukraine.</p> <p>Adding to the sense of alarm, some of Mr. Zelensky’s main allies reduced staffing or evacuated embassies in Kyiv over the weekend. The United States announced a drawdown at the American Embassy except for a “core team” of senior diplomats, citing the risk of combat. Canada announced a pullback of diplomats to the western city of Lviv.</p> |

Russia, too, said it had decided to reduce the staffing of its missions in Ukraine.

Mr. Zelensky has criticized the evacuation of diplomats as needlessly alarmist and remained defiant, playing down the threat to his country — despite some of the most ominous military moves in Europe in decades.

“The best friend for enemies is panic in our country,” he told reporters in southern Ukraine on Saturday, where he observed a police training exercise. Even that choice of venue was significant: The police drilled in anti-riot skills to prevent internal unrest, not a foreign invasion. Mr. Zelensky skipped public appearances at military exercises also underway in Ukraine.

Also over the weekend, the Dutch airline KLM halted flights to Ukraine, and air travel more broadly seemed to be at risk as airline insurers reacted to the U.S. warnings of an imminent war.

Mr. Zelensky’s Ministry of Infrastructure scrambled on Sunday to assure airlines, saying the government had not closed the airspace and suggesting it might step in to safeguard airplanes.

The flight cancellations helped drive home to Ukrainians the seriousness of the military risk. But the infrastructure ministry made no mention of war. It blamed the flight disruptions vaguely on “fluctuations in insurance markets.”

Also over the weekend, the U.S. military said it had withdrawn about 150 National Guard soldiers who were assisting the Ukrainian military as trainers. No matter, Mr. Zelensky seemed to signal: “As a state, we must count on ourselves, on our military, on our citizens.”

A Ukrainian news outlet, Ukrainska Pravda, which has monitored airplane travel through flight tracking sites, reported that on Sunday the largest number of private and chartered jets departed Kyiv in a single day since the group began watching flights six years ago, indicating the country’s elite was getting out.

In another ominous sign on Sunday, American members of a cease-fire observer mission by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to the separate eastern Ukraine conflict packed up and left their hotel, Reuters reported, and British observers pulled out of territory held by Russian-backed separatists to Ukrainian-held areas, local media reported.

The departure of the observers from the front line, just as the risk of war looms, leaves Ukraine with fewer chances that international monitors will be able to report separatist troop movements that might telegraph the start of military action.

Over the weekend, a key adviser to Mr. Zelensky said he saw greater chances for a diplomatic solution than for war, though the diplomacy around the Russian troop buildup has grown threadbare.

On Monday and Tuesday, the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, will visit Kyiv and Moscow. A German official, speaking on background in Berlin, said he did not expect a breakthrough, and it was unclear whether a specific settlement proposal was on the table.

Mr. Scholz, in his meeting with Mr. Putin, will seek to gain a better understanding of Russia’s goals and ascertain if there are options for de-escalation, the official said.

Mr. Zelensky’s optimism, while clearly intended to head off panic, has deeper roots.

Even as a teenager, growing up in a Russian-speaking Jewish family in an industrial city in central Ukraine, Mr. Zelensky took part in stand-up comedy competitions. He eventually founded his own studio, Kvartal 95, whose shows and movies became hits throughout the former Soviet Union.

In one show, “Servant of the People,” Mr. Zelensky played an idealistic schoolteacher who becomes president. The message was so popular that Mr. Zelensky started a political party named for the show, and won the real presidency and a majority in Parliament in elections in 2019.

Like the fictional leader he portrayed, Mr. Zelensky campaigned on a sunny vision of turning a new page for Ukraine and negotiating a peace settlement with Russia.

Mr. Zelensky had hoped for diplomatic backup from the United States in negotiations to end the war with Russian-led separatists in eastern Ukraine, which has been going on for eight years and is distinct from the new threat of a direct Russian attack.

But that strategy unraveled in the events that led to the first impeachment of former President Donald J. Trump, in a first setback for the Ukrainian leader.

As Mr. Zelensky sought U.S. diplomatic support, the U.S. envoy, Kurt Volker, instead worked alongside Mr. Trump’s personal lawyer, Rudolph W. Giuliani, not to negotiate matters of war and peace but rather to request that Mr. Zelensky investigate Mr. Trump’s political opponent, Joseph R. Biden Jr. The requests led ultimately to Mr. Trump’s infamous phone call asking Mr. Zelensky to “do us a favor” and hinting about withholding military aid for Ukraine if he did not.

One result has been distrust by Mr. Zelensky and his top officials of any dealings beyond those directly with the White House, and some disdain for the U.S. foreign policy establishment, as seen in his criticism of American moves to remove diplomats from Ukraine.

Early in his tenure, Mr. Zelensky had floated ideas of resolving the conflict with Russia by wielding Ukraine’s soft power as the largest democracy in the former Soviet Union.

And he had hoped through his personal example to defuse Moscow’s accusations that the Ukrainian government was seized by “neo-fascists” after a 2014 revolution. The Ukrainian government has taken pains to point out that it is the only state outside Israel with both a Jewish president and Jewish prime minister.

But not long after his election, he had also hinted at a stubborn streak. In Ukraine’s dealings with Russia, he had suggested, the country wouldn’t bend. He promoted the establishment of a Ukraine-based, Russian-language television station to broadcast into breakaway areas in the east that could also be accessible online in Russia.

“Ukraine will not give up on its mission to serve as an example of democracy for post-Soviet countries,” he said in his first speech on Russian policy after his election in 2019. Ukraine would resist, and accept help wherever it could, from “everyone who is ready to fight side by side with us for our freedom and for yours.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Oil surge to \$100 threatens world economy |
| SOURCE | https://finance.yahoo.com/news/100-oil-threatens-compound-world-211750831.html |
| GIST | <p>Oil’s surge toward \$100 a barrel for the first time since 2014 is threatening to deal a double-blow to the world economy by further denting growth prospects and driving up inflation.</p> <p>That’s a worrying combination for the U.S. Federal Reserve and fellow central banks as they seek to contain the strongest price pressures in decades without derailing recoveries from the pandemic. Group of 20 finance chiefs meet virtually this week for the first time this year with inflation among their top concerns.</p> <p>While energy exporters stand to benefit from the boom and oil’s influence on economies isn’t what it once was, much of the world will take a hit as companies and consumers find their bills rising and spending power squeezed by costlier food, transportation and heating.</p> |

According to Bloomberg Economics' Shok model, a climb in crude to \$100 by the end of this month from around \$70 at the end of 2021 would lift inflation by about half a percentage point in the U.S. and Europe in the second half of the year.

More broadly, JPMorgan Chase & Co. warns a run-up to \$150 a barrel would almost stall the global expansion and send inflation spiraling to over 7%, more than three times the rate targeted by most monetary policy makers.

"The oil shock feeds into what is now a broader inflation problem," said long-time Fed official Peter Hooper, who's now global head of economic research for Deutsche Bank AG. "There's a decent chance of a significant slowing of global growth" as a result.

Oil is about 50% higher than a year ago, part of a broader rally in commodity prices that's swept up natural gas too. Among the drivers: A post-lockdown resurgence in worldwide demand, geopolitical tensions ignited by oil giant Russia and strained supply chains. Prospects for a renewed Iranian nuclear deal have at times cooled the market.

Still, the rise has been piercing. Just two years ago, oil prices plunged briefly below zero.

Fossil fuels -- oil, as well as coal and natural gas -- provide more than 80% of the global economy's energy. And the cost of a typical basket of them is now up more than 50% from a year ago, according to Gavekal Research Ltd., a consultancy.

The energy crunch also compounds the ongoing squeeze in global supply chains, which drove up costs and delayed raw materials and finished goods.

Vivian Lau, who runs a global logistics company based in Hong Kong, said her customers are already closely watching rising fuel costs.

"The price of oil is definitely a concern," said Lau, vice chair and group chief executive officer of Pacific Air Holdings. "The increase is happening at a time when air freight prices are already very high."

Economists are war gaming scenarios from here.

Goldman Sachs Group Inc., which sees oil at \$100 in the third quarter, estimates a 50% increase lifts headline inflation by an average of 60 basis points, with emerging economies hit most.

The International Monetary Fund recently raised its forecast for global consumer prices to an average 3.9% in advanced economies this year, up from 2.3%, and 5.9% in emerging and developing nations.

"With inflation currently at multi-decade highs and uncertainty surrounding the inflation outlook already unprecedented, the last thing the recovering global economy needs is another leg higher in energy prices," HSBC economists Janet Henry and James Pomeroy wrote in a Feb. 4 report. "Yet that is what it is getting."

China, the world's biggest oil importer and goods exporter, has so far enjoyed benign inflation. But it's economy remains vulnerable as producers are already juggling high input costs and concerns over energy shortages.

With price pressures proving more tenacious than earlier expected, central bankers are now prioritizing inflation fighting over demand support. U.S. consumer prices surprising to a four-decade high sent shocks through the system, increasing bets the Fed will raise rates seven times this year, a faster pace than earlier expected.

Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey this month partly justified the decision to raise U.K. interest rates by pointing to a “squeeze from energy prices.” European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde said recently that officials will “carefully examine” how energy prices will impact the economy as they signal a shift toward tightening. The Reserve Bank of India on Thursday also flagged oil prices as a risk.

To be sure, the world economy is no longer the oil guzzler it was during previous decades, especially the 1970s, and alternative energy offers some buffer. Other pandemic-era insulators include swelling household savings and higher wages amid a tight labor market.

In the U.S. the emergence of the shale oil industry means its economy is less vulnerable to fuel shocks: While consumers are paying more for gasoline, domestic producers are earning more.

Mark Zandi, chief economist for Moody’s Analytics, estimates that each \$10 per barrel increase shaves 0.1 percentage point off of economic growth the following year. That compares with a 0.3 to 0.4 point blow prior to the fracking revolution.

Other oil producers will have reason to celebrate, too.

Russia’s budget, for example, could reap more than \$65 billion in extra revenue this year, helping buffer the Kremlin against possible sanctions over Ukraine. Other emerging market producers would benefit, as would Canada and Middle Eastern economies.

But for most consumers, and central bankers, much rides on how fast and how far energy goes, particularly if economies lose momentum globally.

“A continued rapid rise can raise risks of recession-like conditions in some countries, especially if fiscal policy is also tightening notably,” said Priyanka Kishore of Oxford Economics Ltd., which estimates that every \$10 per barrel increase in oil eats around 0.2 percentage points from world growth.

“Hopefully,” she said, “this is not the straw that breaks the camels back.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Chicago house fire: 7 firefighters injured |
| SOURCE | https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/13/us/chicago-firefighters-injured-mayday-call/index.html |
| GIST | <p>(CNN)Seven Chicago firefighters were injured Saturday while battling a fire that raged through a home on the city's South Side and blew some of the responders off the porch as they tried to control the flames, officials said.</p> <p>Firefighters arrived at the scene of the fire in the Roseland neighborhood at 3:21 p.m. Saturday, Fire Commissioner Annette Nance-Holt said Saturday during a news conference. Shortly after, they issued a MAYDAY call, which is a distress call activated when a fire is highly threatening or a firefighter is injured, according to the Chicago Fire Department.</p> <p>Heavy smoke billowed from windows on the second floor of the house and firefighters also encountered heavy smoke on the first floor, the fire commissioner said.</p> <p>"We had three members inside, and we had four on the porch," Nance-Holt said. "We believe a flashover occurred. We're not exactly sure. We're going to do an investigation into it, but the three members were able to self-evacuate and the four members were actually blown off the porch, and they were outside."</p> <p>Most of the firefighters suffered either minor burns or ortho injuries and were taken to hospitals for treatment, the commissioner added.</p> <p>One of the injured firefighters was expected to return to work Saturday pending medical approval, and others were expected to be released from the hospital. One firefighter who suffered a burn was expected to be transferred to another hospital as a precautionary measure.</p> |

"People don't realize. Every day, our firefighters and paramedics, they get up, and they go to work not knowing that day if they'll come back home. And they put everything on the line to make all of us safer," Nance-Holt said.

According to fire investigators, there were no working smoke detectors in the house, Nance-Holt said, adding the resident of the house had evacuated before firefighters arrived on scene.

The fire is under investigation, Nance-Holt said.

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Seattle soda tax great for beer sales |
| SOURCE | https://reason.com/2022/02/12/study-seattles-soda-tax-has-been-great-forbeer-sales/ |
| GIST | <p>A new study is pouring cold beer on Seattle's soda tax. The study, published in the peer-reviewed journal PLoS ONE, reveals that since the city I call home adopted a soda tax in 2018, residents have swapped out soda and replaced that soda with beer. Pointedly, the study says Seattle's soda tax "induced" consumers to buy more beer.</p> <p>"The good people of Seattle responded to a tax on sugary drinks by buying more beer," Christopher Snowdon, director of Lifestyle Economics at the Institute of Economic Affairs and a leading critic of the nanny state, tweeted after the study's release.</p> <p>The PLoS study, by University of Illinois-Chicago researchers Lisa M. Powell and Julien Lader, compared sales of beer in Seattle both before and since adoption of the soda tax with comparable sales in nearby Portland, Oregon, which has no soda tax.</p> <p>"At two-years post-tax implementation, [the] volume sold of beer in Seattle relative to Portland increased by 7%," the authors report. Though supporters of soda taxes claim (largely without evidence) that they're a successful tool to combat obesity, the authors of the PLoS study note that the dangers of "excess alcohol consumption [include] higher risk of motor accidents/deaths, liver cirrhosis, sexually transmitted diseases, crime and violence, and workplace accidents." Also: obesity.</p> <p>While the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption are known, earnest onlookers also knew consumers would switch from soda to booze as a direct result of a tax on the former. The researchers, for example, note in their study that "a potential unintended consequence of such a policy could be that the tax induces substitution to alcoholic beverages."</p> <p>Several years ago, I contributed an essay to a Cato Institute debate series on soda taxes, in which Snowdon served as the lead commentator.</p> <p>"Drinking soda is neither a sufficient nor a necessary cause of obesity, and consumers can easily switch to other high-calorie products if the price of one product rises," Snowdon explained in his great essay, riffing on a theoretical Pepsi drinker who switches to beer in the face of high soda taxes.</p> <p>Even if Snowdon's Pepsi drinker was theoretical, her switch from soda to beer was backed by data. Indeed, in my essay I linked to a study that found high soda taxes "led to increased purchases of beer."</p> <p>It's also generally understood that if you tax something enough, and it costs more, people will buy less of it. Indeed, various reports have indicated the soda tax has caused a reduction in soda buying in Seattle. That's caused some to argue the tax is "working really well." (That's particularly true if you own a brewery!)</p> <p>There's no inherent reason that Seattleites have switched from soda to beer. I suspect city residents likely might have swapped out soda for liquor, too—the PLoS study didn't examine liquor sales—but Washington State's ridiculously high liquor taxes, which make the city's soda tax look trivial, likely helped to make beer Seattle's soda substitute.</p> |

Interestingly, soda taxes have largely disappeared as an issue in the United States in recent years, and for reasons that aren't quite clear to me. I've assumed that California's excellent (and startling) 2018 statewide [ban](#) on new soda taxes helped dampen the spirits of Cali-covetous activists in the rest of the country. But a switch in consumer palates—particularly among [the White Claw crowd](#)—may play a role, too. It's possible, I suspect, that policymakers have seen that, with soda consumption already on the decline for years without targeted taxes, and perhaps accelerating more recently among younger generations, pushing for taxes that didn't make economic sense several years ago is an even less attractive approach today. Whatever the case, any momentum for such taxes appears to have stalled.

That's good news. After all, people who understand the impact of such taxes—from their [regressive nature](#) to their [utter lack of impact](#)—always found them to be a bad idea.

"It's hard to overstate the abject failure of soda taxes to deliver on their promised benefits," Reason Foundation's Guy Bentley wrote several years ago in a *Washington Post* [op-ed](#). "Nowhere in the world, let alone the United States, have soda taxes reduced obesity."

Although a consumer switch from soda to beer in Seattle was not unexpected, the new study data is a little surprising. Last year, the *Seattle Times* [reported](#) that liquor and wine consumption had increased in the city during the pandemic, but that even though beer remained Seattle's most popular tippie, "beer and hard cider didn't gain in popularity during the pandemic in the Seattle area."

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Inflation seeping in everything everywhere |
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| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/inflation-is-everywhere-including-places-you-might-not-expect-11644748202 |
| GIST | <p>Inflation is seeping through American business, hitting companies in unexpected ways beyond higher prices for materials, shipping or wages.</p> <p>It is adding to legal costs for the maker of Marlboro cigarettes, driving up the bill for auto repairs at Allstate Corp., prompting people to pay less of their credit-card balances and stoking concerns of shrinking ad spending at social-media companies.</p> <p>While companies have been sounding the alarm on inflation for the past year, economists were mostly playing down the rising prices as a temporary disruption caused by the reopening of the economy. Instead, inflation has persisted and recently hit its highest rate in four decades, pushing the Federal Reserve to accelerate its plan to raise interest rates.</p> <p>To preserve profits, companies are passing along more price increases to customers as inflation shows no signs of slowing down.</p> <p>"It kind of cascades from initially a small set of goods to a much larger set of goods," said Chester Spatt, who was chief economist at the Securities and Exchange Commission from 2004 to 2007 and is now a professor of finance at Carnegie Mellon University.</p> <p>Rising prices aren't the main problem with inflation, he said; it is that prices are rising by different amounts at different times. As some prices rise more than others, companies and consumers might change their spending plans, something that can affect the economy as a whole.</p> <p>"If all prices moved by the same amount that would be cause for some concern, but it would be neutral," Mr. Spatt said. "Inflation is also an indication that there is a lot of relative variability in pricing."</p> <p>Car and home insurer Allstate cited inflation, specifically the surge in used-car prices, for the increased costs of auto-accident claims. Used-car values started climbing in late 2020 and accelerated in 2021 to rise 68% since the beginning of 2019, Allstate said when it reported earnings this month. The higher prices are reflected in insurer payments for totaled vehicles.</p> |

In the first half of 2021, Allstate's profit from auto-insurance underwriting was more than \$1.7 billion because a drop in accident frequency offset the rising severity of claims. The number of accidents rose toward pre-pandemic levels in the second half of the year, and the cost of claims continued to rise, resulting in a more than \$450 million underwriting loss over the period.

Glenn Shapiro, president of Allstate's property-liability business, said the supply-chain problems and chip shortages that are driving up prices aren't expected to clear up this year. Meanwhile, the growth in used-car prices should calm down in future quarters, he said. [Used-car prices rose](#) 40.5% in January from a year earlier, according to data released Thursday by the Labor Department.

"There's likely some sort of structural maximum that used-car prices go to," Mr. Shapiro said on the company's earnings call. "They probably won't end up exceeding new cars' prices."

Allstate started raising auto rates in the second half of 2021. It is a reversal from earlier in the pandemic [when it was sending refunds](#) to customers as Americans in 2020 were hunkered down in homes. A Wall Street Journal analysis of 280 companies that had reported quarterly earnings as of Feb. 4 showed that 79% had some discussion of inflation in their conference calls.

For some companies, the increased costs are contractual. Marlboro cigarette maker [Altria](#) Group Inc. expects that inflation will increase the amount it pays from a 1998 landmark tobacco settlement, it said last month. The settlement hit [cigarette makers](#) with legal liabilities that led to \$200 billion in costs over the years.

Annual payments under the settlement are determined using several components, including an inflation adjustment, which is the higher of either 3% a year or the government's inflation data published in January, according to Altria's regulatory filings. The Labor Department reported Thursday that the consumer-price index rose to a 7.5% annual rate in January.

Among social-media companies, [Twitter](#) Inc. and [Facebook](#) parent [Meta Platforms](#) Inc. played down impact from inflation on their operations but also warned that rising costs affecting other businesses—such as freight, materials and wages—could curb advertiser spending.

"We're hearing from advertisers that macroeconomic challenges like cost inflation and supply-chain disruptions are impacting advertiser budgets," said Meta Chief Financial Officer David Wehner on a conference call this month.

Twitter's CFO Ned Segal said inflation could affect the company in a few different ways, including higher wages and brands shifting what goods and services they choose to advertise. "We're not yet seeing real impact from inflation in how our advertising and content partners show up on Twitter," Mr. Segal said.

The steep rises in prices paid by consumers for items such as food, gas and furniture might develop into cautious spending, some financial-services firms said.

Credit-card issuer [Synchrony Financial](#) said the percentage of customers making payments covering their entire balances or more has dropped slightly, with a growing share making minimum payments or lower. The company said spending rose in the second half of 2021 and payment rates, or the amount people pay against their balance, began to fall from historically elevated levels. The company also pointed to the expiration of government aid to consumers.

"Elevated consumer spending, lower consumer savings, inflationary pressures and return to full financial obligations has begun to impact the accumulated savings levels by consumers, which we believe will lead to a moderation in payment rate," said Synchrony CFO Brian Wenzel on a January conference call.

Payments company [PayPal Holdings](#) Inc. said the persistence of inflation's effects on personal consumption, along with labor shortages, supply-chain issues and weaker consumer sentiment, have led it to adopt a more-cautious outlook.

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| | “Our medium-term targets simply did not contemplate inflation at a 40-year high and supply-chain issues not seen in my lifetime,” CFO John Rainey said on a conference call this month. |
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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Ukraine: Russia already started hybrid war |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/russians-have-already-started-hybrid-war-with-bomb-threats-cyberattacks-ukraine-says-11644748413 |
| GIST | <p>KYIV, Ukraine—U.S. officials are warning that Russia could be about to attack Ukraine. For many citizens in this embattled country, the assault has already begun.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials say that Russia, which has positioned more than 100,000 troops around three sides of Ukraine, is stepping up a destabilization campaign involving cyberattacks, economic disruption and a new tactic: hundreds of fake bomb threats.</p> <p>Russian forces and their proxies already control portions of Ukraine and frequent skirmish with government forces. The aim of Moscow’s intensifying hybrid campaign, Ukrainian officials say, is to weaken their country and sow panic, potentially provoking discontent and protests of the kind Russia fomented in eastern Ukraine in 2014 to justify its interventions there. U.S. and U.K. officials said last month they uncovered coup plots intended to install a puppet pro-Russian government.</p> <p>The tactics illustrate how Russian President Vladimir Putin can maintain pressure on Ukraine without escalating to a shooting war that could provoke sanctions from the West. Ukrainian officials say a destabilization campaign is more likely than a large-scale invasion.</p> <p>“The No. 1 task for Russia is to undermine us from inside,” Oleksiy Danilov, the top national security adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, said in a recent interview.</p> <p>Russia has denied it has any plans to invade or cause harm to Ukraine. Moscow argues that the West is causing damage to the ex-Soviet republic by trying to integrate the country into its alliances.</p> <p>Since Russia invaded parts of Ukraine in 2014, it has employed a variety of tactics to try to sap the country’s resources and will to fight. The Kremlin can dial up the level of fighting in Ukraine’s east through the separatists it controls there, killing Ukrainian soldiers and wrecking everyday lives near the front-line. An increase in fighting there could provide the Kremlin with a pretext to send its army deeper into Ukraine, as it did in Georgia in 2008.</p> <p>Russian destabilization efforts since 2014 have had mixed results. Ukrainian support for membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and European Union has grown to more than half the population. Ukraine’s economy hasn’t collapsed, and trade has shifted from Russia to the EU and elsewhere. The Ukrainian government has bolstered cyber defenses and closed TV stations it called propaganda channels.</p> <p>However, weak points remain, and Russia is probing.</p> <p>Ukraine is one of the poorest countries in Europe and has a vulnerable economy. The Russian military buildup has led investors to freeze projects and pull money out of the country. The national currency, the hryvnia, has weakened but not seen a full-blown panic.</p> <p>Russia announced Thursday naval drills in the Black Sea that would close off swaths of water along Ukraine’s southern coast, inhibiting traffic to key ports for exports. Ukraine’s foreign ministry complained about the economic consequences of the closures, calling them part of Russia’s “hybrid warfare.”</p> <p>“Russia’s economic warfare against Ukraine continues,” the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv said on Twitter.</p> |

Russia has long limited sea traffic into the Azov Sea via the Kerch Strait, forming what Ukraine says amounts to a partial blockade of ports including the industrial hub of Mariupol.

“They want to throttle our economy,” said Mr. Danilov.

Ukraine has girded against some of Moscow’s tactics. Kyiv turned off Russian state channels in 2014, saying they were spreading disinformation aimed at fomenting discord. Last year, Mr. Zelensky extended a ban on Russian websites to include social network Vkontakte.

Mr. Zelensky last year also sanctioned the closure of three television channels owned by a close friend of Mr. Putin. The station had lambasted Ukraine’s leadership and promoted closer ties with Russia. Ukrainian officials say it was covertly financed by Moscow and was yet another source of Kremlin disinformation.

“We closed Russian propaganda channels financed by the aggressor country,” said Mr. Danilov, the presidential security adviser. “That isn’t about freedom of speech. It’s about the information war Russia was pursuing.”

After the U.K. identified a Ukrainian lawmaker and television channel owner, Yevhen Murayev, as a potential puppet ruler who could be installed by the Russians, Ukrainian protesters demonstrated outside his channel’s offices in Kyiv and called for its closure. Mr. Murayev denied involvement in any such plot.

Some Ukrainians are taking measures beyond protesting. Myroslav Hai, a military veteran and film producer, set up powerful radio equipment near the front line in the eastern Luhansk region to broadcast Army FM, a Ukrainian radio station, with such a strong signal that it replaced a separatist station in Russia-allied territory.

“It’s important to show that someone is doing something small every day,” he said.

Kyiv has bolstered its cyber defenses after a string of attacks, including with training at “hackathons” organized by the EU and NATO.

Cyberattacks in 2015 and 2016 temporarily took down power grids in Ivano-Frankivsk in western Ukraine and Kyiv, the capital. A malware attack in 2017 affected one in 10 businesses nationwide and was designed to cripple the economy, according to Viktor Zhora, deputy chief of Ukraine’s State Service of Special Communication and Information Protection.

A cyberattack last month, which authorities blamed on Russia and its close ally Belarus, defaced several dozen government websites and installed malware. Mr. Zhora says Ukrainian authorities thwarted a graver attack that was aimed at accessing the state register, a data set on companies and individual entrepreneurs.

“The plan was to destabilize and seek chaos,” said Mr. Zhora.

Another new tactic, according to Ukrainian authorities, is bomb threats.

Ukrainian police said there were nearly 1,000 anonymous messages in January, mostly by email, falsely claiming bomb threats against nearly 10,000 locations, from schools to critical infrastructure.

Kateryna Morozova’s 7-year-old daughter called her last month asking to be collected from school as teachers had told her to leave quickly. A teacher soon said on a messenger group that there had been a bomb threat against the school. Children who had been swimming had to grab what clothes they could and rush outside into the cold and snow, she said.

“I didn’t feel so worried,” said Ms. Morozova, 30 years old. “We got used to these fakes.”

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| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/a-king-county-caseworker-on-wheels-brings-housing-to-homeless-people-via-the-streets/ |
| GIST | <p>There's a lot more than parking and riding going on in King County Metro park-and-ride lots.</p> <p>At least, that's what Tina Lewis has found. There are student drivers slowly navigating the spaces, kids rollerblading between traffic cones, even cookouts and car clubs that leave tire marks on the pavement.</p> <p>But Lewis is looking for more subtle signs of life: missing license plates, rusted windshield wipers, condensation on the glass, broken taillights or expired tags. Signs that someone is living in the vehicle.</p> <p>King County estimated that between 2,100 and 3,300 people lived in cars on any one night over the four years before the pandemic, though this population is one of the hardest to count because of its ability to evade the public eye.</p> <p>Cities and even charities have devoted few, if any, resources to the car-dwelling population because of this invisibility. The residents are usually seen as more able to help themselves and they usually haven't been homeless as long.</p> <p>But in recent years, it's become clearer to budget makers that parking lots like these are teeming with people who could become chronically homeless without intervention. If their poverty can be curbed quickly, the government can save lots of money in 911 responses, hospital visits and camp cleanups in years to come.</p> <p>That's where Tina Lewis and the program she works for, Salvation Army's Street Level, come in. These programs are proliferating and spreading into new parts of King County this year and being copied around the country.</p> <p>It's a fairly simple approach: A Salvation Army outreach worker like Lewis knocks on a car window, talks to the person, and helps with anything from getting a new ID to fixing vehicles to getting a phone.</p> <p>Lewis comes back each week to check on them, eventually helping secure housing and a job, or welfare benefits.</p> <p>In 2019, Street Level's first year of operation, Lewis and her team housed 142 people, more than six times the 21 they'd guaranteed, with a return-to-homelessness rate of zero that first year.</p> <p>King County funded staff for two more vans last year, which deploy this month. A fourth will hit the pavement in June.</p> <p>Lewis is currently training new staff and scoping out new territories to explore in North King County.</p> <p>If there's a secret sauce in this approach, it might just be Tina Lewis herself — because she knows what it's like to live out here.</p> <p>"A lot of people like to ask what drives me," Lewis said on a recent Wednesday, driving through South King County. "A lot of what drives me is the fact that if I had just one person come to me and do what I'm doing for all these folks out here, then I probably would not have gone through all the things that I went through in my life."</p> <p>Caravan rolls in</p> <p>The Auburn Park-and-Ride is unusually quiet on this gray Wednesday morning. It's not yet lunch hour, when workers from the aerospace parts factory or casino next door come to sit in their cars and watch small planes take off from the Auburn airport, and it's the beginning of the month, so there aren't as many homeless people around as usual. The people who have Social Security or welfare checks are likely renting motels nearby; they'll be back as the month drags on and the money runs out.</p> |

The Salvationists roll in with a caravan: two King County Metro sheriffs in their patrol vehicles, then Lewis in her black Ford Explorer, then the branded “Street Level” van full of supplies like socks and clothing, a Wi-Fi hot spot, a printer, a scanner and even a fax machine. Lewis jumps out wearing all black, a red “Salvation Army” shield on her shoulder and a red mask on her face.

Her Wednesday was off to a productive start. Earlier, Lewis met an undocumented man who had been living for eight months in a white Ford sedan with no license plates. Lewis and her crew got him a new ID and connections with a landlord she knows who doesn’t ask about citizenship status.

The Street Level program developed from work by Maj. Phil Smith, who began taking a backpack-shaped coffee dispenser out on the streets of Seattle in 2017. Smith thought it would be better to bring caseworkers to people on the street rather than ask people on the street to come to the caseworker.

“As it grew we were realizing we need to get case managers out here and we need to get people out into the areas in the county where people in vehicles tend to congregate,” said Lt. Col. Cindy Foley. “What if we designed a vehicle that had everything a case manager needed right on the spot?”

Even when there aren’t people around but there are cars that look lived-in, Lewis will drop off her card. Her cellphone is constantly ringing — the ringtone is the theme song to her favorite movie, John Carpenter’s “Halloween” — and many of the callers are new people in need of help.

In this lot, some of the people already know Lewis. She has secured jobs already for one couple living in a truck who just need to get the truck fixed so they can get to the job.

“A godsend”

The approach appears at first like a vehicle-focused version of Seattle’s now-defunct Navigation Team, which used police alongside outreach workers to clear tent encampments.

The Metro sheriffs’ officers are responding often to complaints from commuters or neighbors of the parking lots and sometimes tell people who don’t want help from the Salvation Army to leave. But Lewis’ approach is far less focused than the Navigation Team’s was on getting people referrals to shelters. She also doesn’t use the county’s slow waitlists for supportive housing, just her own connections with landlords who have cheap apartments or sometimes even just rooms in shared housing for rent.

The Navigation Team [was defunded in 2020 by a Seattle City Council](#) that had always largely been skeptical of its effectiveness at getting people sheltered. The council has since replaced that team with only outreach workers, though the police still show up at encampment removals.

Lewis sees local police and county sheriffs as a key part of her outreach: They’re often the ones knocking on windows first.

“By far, this is the most successful outreach program that we’ve worked with,” said Officer Bryan Rose, who goes with Lewis every week. “These guys have been a godsend.”

Rose introduced Lewis to a new face in the park-and-ride: Christiano Reyes, 22, who slept in a parking space last night, but not in a car — just by his shopping cart with his clothes and food, on the ground. He has been homeless since he was 12, and even though he seems resolute and even a little chipper as they talk, it’s obvious he’s jaded.

“The homeless community — it’s changed a lot, actually, over the years,” Reyes says. “We looked out for each other, you know? We made sure that we all had what we needed. It’s changed so significantly now. It’s like you can’t even fall asleep anywhere. So I’m at the park-and-ride because you can’t fall asleep anywhere else.”

Lewis nods.

“I was out here once upon a time, too. And you’re totally right. It’s different now,” she says.

Lewis grew up between Chicago and a Seattle Housing Authority development in Northgate called Cedarvale Village — although the residents just called it “the Village.” She went to high school at Nathan Hale, where she fell in with the wrong crowd, she said, and ended up doing crack cocaine at a party.

Today, Lewis has a long list of drug-related felony convictions and spent years in and out of jail and prison. After losing her children to the state in the late ’90s, she went through the process of regaining custody while in prison, learning how to work the complicated legal system and eventually getting a job teaching workshops for other parents on how to do it.

She believes it was all preparing her for the day in 2018 when the Salvation Army called, asking if she wanted to help spearhead a new program.

Growing role

The Salvation Army has had a presence in Seattle since its infancy. They had “a large following” in the area in 1895, according to early issues of The Seattle Daily Times, and they and other “religious workers” were key in “the relief of the needy.” In the decades since, the Salvation Army has served as a vertebra in Seattle’s social services backbone.

The religious nonprofit’s William Booth Center in Sodo, perhaps the city’s most prominent shelter for veterans, is named after the English evangelist William Booth, who founded the organization in London in 1865 on the vision of a Christian army whose primary fight is relieving poverty and ending vice.

Despite attacks over the years from LGBTQ+ advocates that the Army discriminates against queer people, the Army has grown the most under Seattle’s last two mayors, both of whom were gay. In 2010, the Salvation Army had only about 150 publicly funded shelter beds in King County, according to the federal Housing Inventory Count. In 2020, right before the pandemic hit, they had almost 500.

The most attractive facet of the organization for grant-makers and the government is the ability to “make a nickel scream,” according to Art Langlie, who sits on the board of the local Salvation Army and whose father and grandfather, Washington’s 12th governor, were also involved in the Salvation Army going back to 1922.

When Langlie saw how many people the Street Level program housed in the first year, he got on the phone. He said he was able to raise \$300,000 in less than two hours for the program.

The vans have been noticed by other Salvation Army branches and nearly two dozen have been deployed across the West in places such as Los Angeles.

Of course, connections can still be made the old-fashioned way. Genna Walker, 41, was at a day shelter in Seattle last year when someone gave her Lewis’ number. Walker and her three kids had come to Seattle in November to get out of Fresno, California, where she’d struggled with drugs, and to live near her father, who had exited prison and was living in a halfway house.

Lewis and another Salvation Army staffer got her connected to a job unloading trucks in a warehouse two days later, and into a new three-bedroom apartment — with a voucher for the first month’s rent before Christmas.

“That’s when everything started to work,” Walker said. “That’s when everything started coming together.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Schools: 29,000 students can’t be found |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/keeping-kids-in-school-during-the-pandemic-has-been-tough-in-wa-at-least-29000-cant-be-found/ |

In October, when Daniella got a call from the Kent School District, she had been away from school for so long that she didn't even know where to start to get back in.

A couple years ago, she felt out of place at a new high school and stopped going. She tried an alternative high-school completion program run by the district [called iGrad](#).

Then COVID-19 hit. Her dad, who paints and fixes up houses, was cobbling together small jobs and gone a lot. When around, he urged her to go to school, but she lost motivation and left iGrad in October 2020.

She looked after the house. Months passed. "If schools were open, I feel like I could go back and actually talk to someone," said the now-18-year-old. But they had long since gone remote.

Around the state and country, school districts have grappled with [big enrollment drops](#) and high numbers of disengaged students during the pandemic — to the extent that some, as far as educators know, have [gone missing](#). They are not going to school anywhere at all.

"Disengagement isn't a new problem, but this is a different kind of magnitude," said Krissy Johnson, assistant director of attendance and engagement for the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).

One measure — the percentage of students attending Washington public schools in a given spring who don't return in the fall and aren't on record as home schooling, in private school, in another state or receiving a diploma or GED — shows an increasingly troubling pattern. Excluding prekindergarten students, about 23,300 kids disappeared from sight in 2019, as best as educators can tell. (They noted reporting from early years is less reliable.) The year after COVID hit, the number of missing kids shot up to roughly 27,800, the following year more than 29,000.

Not known is whether any of the students have come back.

Liz Huizar, who oversees youth programs in Seattle and South King County for the nonprofit El Centro de la Raza, said there was an assumption that students would re-engage with school when they could go in person last fall. "What we saw was that there was still a pretty critical population of students who hadn't returned." The structure, the social pressure, the need to catch up academically — it was all too much for some kids after so long away. Many, too, are working jobs to make up for family income lost during the pandemic. Even if they want to return to school, the path back can be complicated and seem overwhelming.

"There will be trailing effects, I think, in the coming months and years," OSPI Assistant Superintendent Martin Mueller said. Research on disrupted education, for instance after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, shows those affected are less likely to be employed or in school even a decade later.

COVID's exacerbation of a longstanding problem has brought it new but uneven attention.

The state superintendent's office, drawing upon federal pandemic relief money, has launched projects to re-engage students by offering mentoring, tutoring and family visits, among other strategies. It has given out \$14 million in grants to districts.

"It's not a huge amount," Mueller acknowledged. "That's why we're trying to be pretty targeted with it." Twenty-two of the state's nearly 300 districts, chosen because they had the poorest rates of attendance, dropout and other indicators of student performance, received funding.

Seattle Public Schools was not eligible, according to spokesperson Tim Robinson, though he said the district lacks staffing to follow-up with students who have withdrawn for uncertain reasons or after excessive absenteeism. It's not clear how many that is, nor the district's number of chronically absent students. To find out, the district is requiring The Seattle Times to submit a formal public records request it said would take a month to fulfill.

According to data released by OSPI in November, Seattle's enrollment [dropped by nearly 3,500](#) students, or about 6.4%, between fall 2019 and fall 2021.

The state also has not yet released some data. Last year's attendance figures, due to be made public last Wednesday, are now scheduled for release this week and may raise questions even then. Reporting was not necessarily reliable at a time that "going to class" meant looking (or maybe not looking) at a screen.

"This is concerning to me, in itself: The fact that we just don't know. We don't know where kids are right now," said Robin Lake, director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education, a Washington-based research organization.

Lake said other areas around the country have been transparent in talking about the problem and what they intend to do about it. She pointed to [San Antonio](#), where districts and community groups have been knocking on doors to find kids and bring them back to school.

That is happening in some parts of Washington.

Finding the missing students

At the beginning of this school year, the Kent district hired Karina Oscoy Cazares as a re-engagement specialist. The district stopped filing truancy petitions during remote learning, following emergency rules issued by OSPI so as not to penalize kids. But the district kept track of excessively absent students, drawing up a list that ran to almost 300 names.

"OK, so now who's going to keep following up with these students?" the district asked itself at the end of last year, recalled Cheri Simpson, interim director of student and family support services.

Enter Oscoy Cazares. She tries to learn why students are not coming to school and looks for solutions. If parents are afraid to send them because of COVID, for example, she helps fill out applications for online schooling. Timing is key. A dragged out process can lose momentum.

So when she reached Daniella, Oscoy Cazares immediately arranged a meeting and invited Centro Rendu case manager Celina Quintana Marquez. Part of Catholic-run social services agency St. Vincent de Paul, Centro Rendu assists Latino families, including by partnering with the Kent district to launch a new program for truant or frequently absent students and their parents, and running a youth leadership group whose members support one another through the ups and downs of school and life.

Daniella was by then tired of being stuck at home. The meeting hatched a plan: Daniella would apply to the [Washington Youth Academy](#), a free residential program in Bremerton run by the National Guard for youth who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out.

There was a long application, transcripts to send, a physical exam to schedule. Quintana Marquez walked Daniella through the process, and also helped her arrange to get additional credits she needed at a Renton Technical College high-school completion program.

The day before she left for Bremerton, where she would begin a [strict regime](#) requiring her to be up before dawn, Daniella said she was nervous but excited.

"We are so extremely proud of you," Oscoy Cazares told her.

Last summer, people working on truancy programs for King County Superior Court also tried to find missing students — about 1,700 from five participating districts, according to Jennie Tibbitts, one of the staffers involved. Those districts were Auburn, Federal Way, Highline, Renton and Tukwila.

An initial vetting determined roughly 30% had transferred elsewhere. The remainder of names went to community groups, which called, texted, emailed and knocked on doors to track kids down.

Even before the pandemic, the county's Superior Court had long since abandoned using jail or fines to punish truant students and their parents, according to Connor Lenz, who manages related court programs. Instead, the court would refer students to programs aiming to help them.

The pandemic has brought renewed emphasis to that approach and prompted the court to start a new program to support struggling students *before* a truancy petition is filed. The so-called [Community Attendance Support Team](#) takes referrals from parents and schools as well as students themselves.

Getting kids back to school is complicated work, all the more so given the multiplicity of reasons keeping them away during the pandemic.

Terrell Dorsey, head of [Unleash the Brilliance](#), an organization that gives education re-engagement workshops for students in King County and a growing number of other areas, did much of last summer's outreach for the court. He said he was struck by the poverty he saw. Kids weren't getting much sleep in noisy, crowded households. Without consequences like truancy petitions, Dorsey said, students lost the sense of urgency to wake up and attend class.

Because school is now in person, truancy petitions can be filed again. But some kids continue to miss school while they work, or look after younger siblings amid a [child-care crisis](#).

Tara Hobson, principal of the Seattle World School, which serves recent immigrants, said teachers and staff at the beginning of the school year called expected students who hadn't shown up. Many had jobs.

"Is there any way we can make your schedule work so that you can come to school?" the educators asked. "Oh, I can come two days a week or I can only come from, you know, 9 to 11," Hobson recalled some saying. "We're, like, no, you have to come enough so you can master some of this content."

On the edge

For Selena, 17, remote learning was a nonstarter. "I felt like I didn't have much support," the Kent student recalled. She fell back on old habits.

"I wasn't going to school. I wasn't doing anything. I was just getting high out there in the streets," she said.

A court sent her to an out-of-town rehab facility. When she came back in November, Quintana Marquez picked her up from the airport, ready to help get Selena back in school.

Quintana Marquez said she pushed to get Selena re-enrolled at her old high school, overcoming misgivings by administrators due to the teen's past. Centro Rendu also offered Selena an internship and got her involved in its youth leadership group.

By mid-January, Selena was still in that group but she had stalled academically. One Wednesday afternoon, she met with David Lujano, Centro Rendu's youth program manager.

"How was your day?" asked Lujano, a burly and ebullient 44-year-old. They were sitting in Lujano's office, housed in a St. Vincent de Paul thrift store in Kent.

Selena talked quietly. "My day was OK. I didn't go to school. I woke up and made it on time here." "I'm just wondering if there's something that happened that is setting you back or making you rethink," Lujano said.

"Being sick," Selena murmured. She had come down with COVID and just emerged from isolation. But she was also disillusioned with school, and wanted to get her GED.

Centro Rendu could sign her up at iGrad and provide tutoring, Lujano said, but Selena would still have to show up at school for a certain number of hours a week and study largely on her own. “Do you feel like you’re up for that challenge?” he asked.

Something in Selena stirred. “I have faith in myself,” she said. Asked how much she wanted to get it done on a scale of 1 to 8, she declared herself an 8.

Lujano approved. In fact, he said, “I feel like you’re probably at a 10 ... You’re still pushing forward.”

Others, not so much.

The next day, Lujano went to the home of a 17-year-old who hadn’t been going to school for at least two years — the entire course of the pandemic. He wasn’t coming home much either, and was hanging around gang members, his mom told Lujano.

He and Soledad Whirt, a staffer from Centro Rendu’s youth programs, hoped to catch the young man. But when they arrived in the late afternoon at his home, in a complex of small houses offering temporary shelter for homeless families, they found only his mom.

“He’ll come home and take a shower and then he’ll be gone,” she said.

Why he had strayed so far, from school and home, is undoubtedly a complex question. His mom said she couldn’t get her son to open a laptop during remote schooling.

But she also said the family had been on a downward spiral since the teen’s father was deported three years ago. And there had been serious family problems before; she alleged her ex had sold drugs and threatened her with violence. And now, she, her son and a younger daughter had to be out of their temporary home in a matter of weeks.

Those trying to help kids stay in school say you sometimes have to stabilize their families first. Lujano told the mom St. Vincent de Paul has a [helpline](#) that offers assistance with emergency needs like housing. It also has a food bank. “If you don’t mind, maybe I could put something together for you ... we could deliver that.”

Meanwhile, could she let him know if her son appears? “If he shows up and I’m around, I can just shoot over.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Traffic tickets down as traffic nears normal |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/traffic-tickets-in-wa-are-way-down-yet-traffic-is-returning-to-normal/ |
| GIST | <p>Two years after the beginning of the pandemic, traffic enforcement across Washington state remains a fraction of what it was in 2019, even as cars return to the state’s highways at near-normal levels.</p> <p>In courts across the state, traffic infractions are simply not returning to previous levels. It’s a sign of what police officials largely acknowledge to be true: Their officers aren’t pulling over as many people as they once did.</p> <p>Law enforcement officials offer varying explanations for why stops are down, from staffing shortages, to continued pandemic closures, a shift in approach to minor infractions, automated enforcement and officers’ wariness of running afoul of new state rules regulating police conduct.</p> <p>While the downward trend began as the state locked down for COVID in the early months of 2020, court data collected by the state shows a continued drop-off, well past the most stringent coronavirus containment measures and as traffic volumes returned. In fact, court data shows fewer infractions were</p> |

filed in December 2021 than in any month in the previous two years, except for April 2020. The total in December of last year was less than half what it was in December 2019 and down a third from December 2020, even as traffic volume on state highways was off by just 5%.

The decline is nearly universal, in agencies both large and small. Staffing is the most commonly cited disrupter of traffic patrol.

The Yakima Police Department's traffic unit is down 75%, according to Chief Matthew Murray. The Everett Police Department currently has just one motorcycle officer in traffic safety, down from four, said Chief Dan Templeman. Until recently, Spokane had moved all five of its traffic enforcement officers into patrol positions, said spokesperson Julie Humphreys.

What's clear is that there's more underlying the downward trend than just pandemic slowdowns, said Steve Strachan, executive director of the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs. "There certainly was a downturn when the pandemic first hit, although traffic was back to pretty much pre-pandemic levels last summer," he said. "That was really a year and a half ago."

The decrease in infractions comes at a time when some lawmakers and cities are scrutinizing and rethinking police involvement in traffic stops altogether. It also comes as Washington and the country see record numbers of serious and fatal crashes involving cars.

But when so much about normal life has been upended, pinpointing the precise repercussions of depressed enforcement can be challenging.

"I'm guessing there obviously will be impacts," said Sgt. Darren Wright of the Washington State Patrol. "But what the extent of those impacts are, I just don't know."

Police back off

Traffic infractions hit bottom in April 2020 — down nearly 80% compared to April 2019 — as widespread pandemic lockdown measures carried over from the month before. That cliff correlated closely to declines in traffic volume on state highways.

As traffic evaporated, police backed off face-to-face interactions with the public, including with drivers. "We can't conduct a socially distant traffic stop," said Tim Meyer, spokesperson for the King County Sheriff's Office.

Traffic volume crept back up after the initial lockdown and so, too, did enforcement. The number of infractions came close to pre-pandemic numbers at points during the summer of 2020 and were 90% of normal in March 2021.

But by late summer 2021, they began to fall again, even as traffic volume on state highways remained steady. Between July and November of 2021, total infractions were less than half of what they'd been two years prior and down nearly 35% from 2020.

There were several possible explanations. Traffic cameras have begun to play a larger role in enforcement. The pandemic continues to be a factor. Offices in large cities remain closed. And school zones are still quieter than before the pandemic.

But Strachan argued there were two main reasons behind the late-summer drop.

The first is staffing. Departments across the state have struggled to retain and recruit officers.

"There simply aren't enough people to do proactive traffic enforcement," he said.

Wright of the Washington State Patrol agreed. “We are several hundred troopers down and so that is affecting our proactive activities,” he said. The agency is still able to react to extreme speeders or collisions, Wright added.

Strachan also argued that state-level police reforms regulating use of force and vehicular pursuits were depressing traffic enforcement. Officers are nervous about the new laws and therefore may be more hesitant to engage with drivers, he said.

“Law changes from the middle of this past year have resulted in really high levels of discomfort because of the ambiguity,” he said.

Meyer said he didn’t think the state legislation was playing a role. Advocates for the reforms, which limit when officers are allowed to use force or pursue fleeing vehicles, have said law enforcement’s reading of the bills is obtuse and overly broad.

Regardless of the bill’s true meaning, traffic enforcement dropped significantly in July 2021 — the same month the limitations on use of force took effect — and has remained low since. It’s a trend similar to police response to people in crisis, which law enforcement has also blamed on the new reform legislation.

In a memo to lawmakers this month, state Attorney General Bob Ferguson said “physical force” was not well defined in the legislation “and therefore there is significant uncertainty as to its meaning.” The Legislature is considering revisions to the law, over the objection of some groups, such as the ACLU.

Alternatives to enforcement

Meyer offered another reason enforcement may be down: a “reset” in officers’ approach to traffic stops, spurred on by scrutiny of their disproportionate impact on people of color.

“We recognize that, yeah, the traffic stop is, in some cases, a point where we’re maybe not furthering the goodwill of the community,” he said. “And that’s really not where we want to be right now.”

The New York Times recently reported that, over the past five years, more than 400 unarmed people were killed by police following a traffic stop, of which Black people were disproportionately represented.

“In the wake of demands for systemic transformation related to policing and public safety, traffic enforcement is one arena where a lot of change ought to happen,” said Daniela Gilbert, director of the Vera Institute of Justice’s Redefining Public Safety program. Vera advocates for civilianizing traffic enforcement, adding more automated enforcement like red light cameras and focusing on improving road infrastructure.

The Seattle Police Department recently announced it would no longer pull over drivers for minor infractions like driving with expired tabs or a cracked window. Other cities have gone further: Berkeley, California, is moving toward replacing some traffic enforcement with unarmed civilians.

Sen. Joe Nguyen, D-Seattle, sponsored legislation in Olympia for the second year in a row, [Senate Bill 5485](#), to ban traffic stops for several low-level infractions, over the opposition of some law enforcement groups. The bill failed to advance from committee this session, but he anticipates bringing it back next year. While his ultimate motivation is to reduce potentially deadly interactions with the police, the bill would have the added benefit of freeing up officer resources, he argued.

“It’s one of those things where if you fix this, everybody wins,” he said.

Road safety

Last year was Washington state’s deadliest year on the roads since 2006.

Shelly Baldwin, director of the Washington Traffic Safety Commission, said the pullback of enforcement may have contributed.

“People kind of knew that maybe they weren’t going to get caught doing the kinds of things that they would have gotten caught doing,” she said in a December interview.

For others, the role of traffic enforcement in road safety is not always clear and its prioritization disputed.

“We’re pretty certain, at least from the quality of research on the subject, that the relationship is not exactly linear,” said Seth LaJeunesse, senior research associate with the Highway Safety Research Center at the University of North Carolina. “So it’s not like you add a dose of enforcement and therefore you have a reduction in fatal injury.”

Hester Serebrin, policy director for Transportation Choices Coalition, which advocates for more transit funding and better pedestrian infrastructure, said focusing too much on enforcement to improve safety takes away from more lasting and effective solutions. “If the goal is transportation safety, I would hope that we would consider investing in infrastructure because infrastructure is the permanent solution,” she said.

She pointed out that pedestrian fatalities were on the rise well before the pandemic. Roads should be “self-enforcing” by making speeding difficult to do, she said.

Meyer, with the King County Sheriff’s Office, said he believes the days of using infractions as a yardstick for policing is on its way out.

“I’m not going to measure my success based on the number of tickets I’ve written, I’m going to measure it on goodwill, bigger cases, things like that,” he said. “And so I think you’re seeing that shift in mindset of, our worth isn’t valued based on tickets.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Baltic worry: Russia in Belarus permanent |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/12/russia-baltics-nato-suwalki-gap/ |
| GIST | <p>TALLINN, Estonia — The Baltic countries are warning their NATO allies that Russian military exercises underway in Belarus could lead to a permanent Russian troop presence in that Eastern European country, with alarming risks for the long-term security of the Western alliance.</p> <p>The Russian military buildup in Belarus appears aimed at Ukraine for now, but the new deployments are sending chills through Belarus’s Baltic neighbors — Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — as well as some Eastern European countries because of the possibility of a game-changing Russian presence on or near their borders.</p> <p>Between 20,000 and 30,000 Russian troops along with warplanes, missile batteries and air defense systems have moved into Belarus in recent weeks, officially to participate in a military exercise, according to Russia’s Defense Ministry. The exercise, called United Resolve 2022, began Thursday, and Russian officials have said the troops will go home when the exercise ends on Feb. 20.</p> <p>But the size and nature of the exercise — which comes at a time when Russian President Vladimir Putin is demanding a retrenchment of NATO’s presence in Eastern Europe — have given rise to fears that Russia may seize the moment to leave the troops in Belarus indefinitely, extending Russia’s reach deeper into Europe, Western officials say.</p> <p>Baltic leaders have been raising the alarm in recent days in meetings with NATO allies, warning that an ongoing Russian troop presence in Belarus would significantly shift the military balance of power in Russia’s favor. They have called for additional NATO reinforcements along the alliance’s eastern flank to redress the imbalance.</p> <p>“The unprecedented mobilization of Russian troops in Belarus is of particular concern,” Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte said following a meeting earlier this week with British Prime Minister Boris</p> |

Johnson, according to comments quoted by the Lithuanian government's press service. "It is very important for Lithuania to have an increased NATO partners' presence in Lithuania," she added.

NATO has already dispatched reinforcements, including thousands of troops, ships and aircraft, to Eastern Europe in an effort to reassure nervous allies that the alliance will stand by them in the event of a major military escalation.

More are needed in light of the "probable" intent of the Russian troops to remain in Belarus, Poland's Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau told U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken during their recent meeting in Washington, according to the official Polish news agency. Poland also shares a long border with Belarus.

"We are trying to convince people that deterrence needs to be increased, that more Atlantic Alliance troops are needed in the face of a potential threat growing on the other side of our border," the agency quoted Rau as saying.

Western officials say the Russian deployments pose no imminent military threat to any part of Europe other than Ukraine. The immediate fear is that the military exercise underway in Belarus is in preparation for an attack on Ukraine, given that almost all the Russian forces in Belarus are positioned along its southern border with Ukraine, according to Thomas Bullock, a senior analyst with Janes, a defense intelligence provider.

A longer-term concern for the Baltics, however, is the vulnerability of a stretch of land along the Polish-Lithuanian border known as the Suwalki Gap. The area separates Belarus from the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, a pinprick of territory that remained part of Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

If Russia were to seize control of the 40-mile gap and link the Kaliningrad enclave with Belarus, the Baltics would be cut off from the rest of NATO and unable to receive reinforcements by land, said Kusti Salm, the permanent secretary of Estonia's Ministry of Defense. "Now we are a peninsula. We would become an island," he said.

If there were no Russian troops in Belarus, NATO allies would probably be able to detect preparations for such an offensive weeks in advance, he said. But with Russian troops already in the country, the warning time would be reduced to "days or even hours."

"This dramatically changes the calculus for all of NATO because it reduces the early warning time," Salm said. "Belarus gives Russia a huge operational advantage."

The Baltic countries, which were formerly part of the Soviet Union, have long felt uniquely vulnerable among NATO allies for reasons of geography and history, and they are among the most vocal advocates for a robust Western response to the Russian threat to Ukraine. Their proximity to Russia and recent memory of Russia's occupation before 1991 leave residents with a heightened fear of another war in Europe, said Estonia's foreign minister, Eva-Maria Liimets.

"Our understanding is more realistic," she said. "We really sense the threat here because of our history and our experience."

NATO officials have said they share the Baltics' concerns. Rob Bauer, the Dutch admiral who heads NATO's Military Committee, did not rule out future adjustments to the alliance's force posture in the area.

"It very much depends, of course, on whether the Russian troops in Belarus remain in Belarus," he told journalists during a visit last week to the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius.

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 NY returning to pre-omicron surge levels |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/12/us/new-york-covid-hospitalizations.html |

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| GIST | <p>As public health officials and others debate the moves of several Democratic governors this week to relax pandemic restrictions, new coronavirus data released on Saturday for New York show just how far the state has come from its most recent peak in January, when daily new infections and hospitalizations were alarmingly high.</p> <p>Gov. Kathy Hochul announced that 3,883 New Yorkers were hospitalized with the virus on Friday, the lowest since Dec. 19 when the Omicron variant was just taking hold across the state and country.</p> <p>And Friday’s statewide positivity rate — the share of positive cases among those tests reported — was at 2.5 percent, a far cry from the 23 percent positivity rate recorded just after New Year’s Day.</p> <p>“New Yorkers should be proud of our continued progress in bringing down the numbers since the Omicron peak in January, but this is no time to let up,” Governor Hochul said in a statement with the new data. “The vaccine is our best defense, and it’s safe, effective and doctor-recommended for all New Yorkers ages 5 and up.”</p> <p>The governor cited the declining numbers when she announced this week that she would lift the statewide mask-or-vaccine mandate for indoor public spaces. Localities and businesses will no longer have to require masks or ask for proof of vaccination, but they are still free to do so, she said.</p> <p>New York City, once the epicenter of the pandemic, has had more stringent mask rules than many other parts of the country. Governor Hochul’s announcement lifted some, but not all, of those restrictions, taking the city back to the mask rules that were in place before the Omicron surge began in December.</p> <p>That means masks are still required in the city while riding public transportation, including when taking car services and taxis. They will still be required inside schools, in child care or health care settings, and at group residential facilities such as nursing homes and homeless shelters.</p> <p>But the governor’s announcement still signified a notable change. “Numbers are coming down, and it is time to adapt,” Ms. Hochul said on Wednesday.</p> <p>Critics have questioned the timing of the change in New York and other states, noting that hundreds of thousands of infections are still being reported across the United States each day.</p> <p>But even the countrywide data reached an encouraging point this week: The seven-day daily average number of cases dropped below 200,000 on Friday for the first time since Christmas Eve.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Violence rises in the West Bank |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/12/world/middleeast/settler-violence-west-bank.html |
| GIST | <p>BURIN, West Bank — The Israeli settlers streamed down the hill toward Palestinian farmland, some waving sticks, some throwing stones, all masked.</p> <p>They began beating a group of Palestinian villagers and Israeli rights activists, who had been planting olive trees on the edge of a Palestinian village. One settler threw a flammable liquid across an activist’s car and set it ablaze. At least seven people were injured.</p> <p>The mob attack outside the village of Burin last month, captured on video by human rights advocates, was part of an escalation of civilian violence across the occupied West Bank in the past year. In 2021, the number of injurious attacks by settlers on Palestinians, and by Palestinians on settlers, reached their highest levels in at least five years, according to the United Nations.</p> <p>Settlers injured at least 170 Palestinians last year and killed five, U.N. monitors reported. During the same period, Palestinians injured at least 110 settlers and killed two, U.N. records show. The Israeli Army said that Palestinians had injured 137 Israeli civilians in the West Bank last year.</p> |

But if the numbers are roughly comparable, the power dynamic is different.

The settlers benefit from a two-tier legal system in which settlers who commit violence are rarely punished, while Palestinian suspects are frequently arrested and prosecuted by military courts. Of the 111 police investigations into settler attacks monitored by the Israeli rights group Yesh Din in the past five years, only three led to indictments.

Settlers, unlike Palestinians, have the protection of the military and are rarely in danger of losing the land they live on.

And it is the settler violence that is now attracting most alarm — not only among Palestinians, but also from the Israeli security establishment.

Benny Gantz, Israel's defense minister, described it as “a serious phenomenon” and announced the formation of special military teams to patrol flash points like Burin. Three Israeli reserve generals wrote in January that settler violence posed a threat not only to Palestinians, but also to Israel's stability and its global image.

But the impunity of recent settler attacks has led to concerns that the Israeli military is not doing enough to stop them. In some cases, repeated attacks have driven Palestinian farmers off their land, helping expand direct Israeli control over the West Bank.

“I was scared and shocked — can you imagine being on your own land and suddenly being attacked by a criminal gang?” said Brusli Eid, 46, one of the Burin residents attacked last month. “They're trying to make us sick of being on our land.”

Violence has long been deployed by both Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank. Israel occupied the territory in 1967, and it has since been settled — illegally, according to most interpretations of international law — by hundreds of thousands of Israelis, many of whom consider the land their biblical birthright.

Settler attacks are carried out by an extremist minority, condemned by Israeli officials, and do not involve the vast majority of Israeli settlers.

And the recent violence, which rose sharply during the Gaza war last spring and the Palestinian olive harvest last fall, is still far lower than in more intense periods of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

But rights groups have documented several instances over the past year where the military either stood by and did nothing as an attack took place or, as in Burin last month, did too little too late.

“Time and again we see incidents of settler violence in which the army stands next to the settlers and effectively provides them protection,” said Lior Amihai, the director of Yesh Din. “That gives settlers the confidence to continue their attacks and vindicates the Palestinian belief that they have no one to call for protection.”

In an earlier confrontation in Burin last October, a masked settler set a Palestinian olive grove on fire as his companions and Palestinian villagers threw stones at each other, according to video taken by Yesh Din. An Israeli soldier approached and, according to the video, spoke briefly to the settlers, who walked away, the fires still raging around them. None were arrested, the police said.

In a third confrontation at the same spot in November, video showed a row of six Israeli soldiers standing motionless as settlers and Palestinians threw rocks at each other. When they finally acted to defuse the situation, they fired tear gas at the Palestinians, according to video and witnesses, and again allowed the settlers to go home.

Two of the nine settlers were later arrested before being released pending further investigation, the police said. After the mob attack in January, one person was arrested and two detained, but none have been charged.

The army said that any claim that it “supports and permits settler violence is false,” and that the two videos did not tell the whole story of the confrontations. In each, it said in a statement, troops did not initially intervene because they were outnumbered and waiting for reinforcements.

In other cases, the army has issued restraining orders and curfews against settlers they deem a potential threat.

Maj. Gen. Yehuda Fuchs, the commander of Israeli troops in the West Bank, said in an interview that he was concerned about what he called “settler terrorism,” and was exerting “a lot of effort to avoid it.”

His job, he said, was to protect all residents of the West Bank, “never mind if they are Israelis or Palestinians.”

To the villagers of Burin, settler attacks are part of a strategic attempt to push them off their land. Since the 1980s, the village has gradually become sandwiched between the hilltop settlements of Yitzhar and Givat Ronen.

Both settlements are built partly on privately owned Palestinian plots and are protected by the Israeli Army. Among their 2,000 residents are followers of two extremist rabbis.

And while most Israeli settlements are considered legal by Israel, and illegal under international law, Givat Ronen and outposts of Yitzhar are unauthorized by the government and illegal under Israeli law.

Israelis coming from the direction of these settlements attacked Palestinians or vandalized their property in Burin and neighboring villages at least 18 times in 2021, according to Yesh Din.

Such harassment has contributed to the seizure of at least 250 acres of private Palestinian land around these two settlements in recent decades, the organization said.

There is no overall estimate for the amount of private Palestinian land lost this way across the West Bank, but a 2021 study of four settlements conducted by the Israeli rights groups B’Tselem and Kerem Navot estimated that settlers had seized more than 9,000 acres of Palestinian farmland through intimidation in those locations alone.

Families living on the edge of Burin have installed metal grills on their windows to prevent rocks from shattering the glass and security cameras to observe settler attacks from inside. Some bar their children from playing at the edge of the village.

“We’re scared they’ll get kidnapped or killed,” said Aya Eid, 16.

Violence against farmers and vandalism against their trees have become so common — more than 11,700 Palestinian-owned olive trees were damaged last year, according to the U.N. — that the Israeli Army provides escorts so farmers can safely reach their groves.

But because the army patrols each affected plot as little as two or three days a year, some farmers reached their groves just twice last year, not nearly enough time, they say, to complete the necessary work.

Before the nearby settlements were built, the olive harvest in Burin had a carnival-like atmosphere, several villagers said. Entire families camped out under the trees, grilled meat in the evenings and sang songs about olives.

It was “almost a holy activity,” said Abdelmuhamen Asous, 46.

But in recent years, small groups of harvesters have spent only a few hours at a time in the groves, reducing their revenues by more than half, they say.

Mr. Asous now earns more money as a garbage collector in Burin. “We can’t wait for this harvest to end,” he said. “Because you don’t know whether you’ll come back alive.”

In Yitzhar and Givat Ronen, no one publicly defends the recent attacks, let alone admits to participating in them. Community leaders say they were conducted by disenfranchised youths who tainted the settlers’ cause by associating it with violence.

A spokesman for Yitzhar, Tzvi Succot, disowned the recent violence but said he understood its cause: The attackers, he said, were afraid of the Palestinians, felt unprotected by the army and believed they needed to strike pre-emptively.

In 2008, a Palestinian man stabbed and wounded a boy from Yitzhar, and in 2009, two Palestinians killed five members of a Jewish family in their home in a nearby settlement — attacks that still haunt settlers, he said.

Noam Jackson, a founder of Givat Ronen, said he did not recognize any of the masked settlers filmed in the recent attacks near his settlement, and could not speak to their motives. But he said it was possible that they were angry that Palestinians like the Eids had constructed new homes near the settlement, making it harder for the settlement to expand.

It is “logical that this construction is something that they would like to respond to,” he said.

Although Givat Ronen and the Yitzhar outposts are unauthorized, the government has taken no action to remove them, and has instead provided them with military protection, while municipal authorities have supplied them with services like garbage collection.

The farmers could take their land claims to court, but such cases are rarely successful.

The prime minister’s office and the Defense Ministry both declined to comment on this dynamic.

Since Mr. Gantz sent in new military patrols last fall, the rate of attacks has fallen. But the olive harvest was nearly over by then, so it is likely to be another year before the effect of the new patrols can be assessed.

Palestinians say they will mean little if the army does not maintain this presence — and if they do not arrest violent settlers.

Brusli Eid, a Palestinian police detective, named for the martial arts movie star Bruce Lee, was shot in 2011 by a settler in his elbow and pelvis while building a home nearby. The Israeli authorities dropped criminal charges against three suspects in the attack, citing a lack of evidence.

“What does that look like to you?” he asked. To him, he said, it looks like “the Israeli government is protecting the settlers and encouraging their actions.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 UK scientists: next strain could kill more |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/12/scientists-plead-caution-covid-restrictions-lifted-england |
| GIST | <p>A future variant of Covid-19 could be much more dangerous and cause far higher numbers of deaths and cases of serious illness than Omicron, leading UK scientists have warned.</p> <p>As a result, many of them say that caution needs to be taken in lifting the last Covid restrictions in England, as Boris Johnson plans to do next week.</p> |

At the same time, demands are growing for Chris Whitty and [Patrick Vallance](#), the government's most senior advisers on Covid, to hold a press conference to reveal what evidence there was to back the decision to end all pandemic restrictions.

The dangers posed by accepting the widespread assumption that Covid-19 variants would continue to get milder in their impact was highlighted by epidemiologist Prof Mark Woolhouse, of Edinburgh University.

"The Omicron variant did not come from the Delta variant. It came from a completely different part of the virus's family tree. And since we don't know where in the virus's family tree a new variant is going to come from, we cannot know how pathogenic it might be. It could be less pathogenic but it could, just as easily, be more pathogenic," he said.

This point was backed by virologist Prof Lawrence Young of Warwick University. "People seem to think there has been a linear evolution of the virus from Alpha to Beta to Delta to Omicron," he told the *Observer*. "But that is simply not the case. The idea that virus variants will continue to get milder is wrong. A new one could turn out to be even more pathogenic than the Delta variant, for example."

David Nabarro, a special envoy on Covid-19 for the World Health Organization, also highlighted the uncertainty of how future variants might behave: "There will be more variants after Omicron and if they are more transmissible they will dominate. In addition, they may cause different patterns of illness, in other words they may turn out to be more lethal or have more long-term consequences."

Nabarro urged authorities to continue to plan for the possibility that there will be surges in numbers of people who are ill and need hospital care. "It would be prudent to encourage people to protect themselves and others consistently. An approach that does not do this would be a gamble with potentially severe consequences. I cannot see any upsides to such a gamble. The pandemic has a long way to go and – as is the case since it started – people and their leaders will influence its long-term impact through actions they take now."

The warnings came as charities and teachers called for England's chief medical officer and chief scientific adviser to offer a public explanation of the plan, unveiled in parliament last week, to lift all Covid restrictions – including the requirement to isolate after testing positive – in England from Thursday 24 February.

The call comes as new figures suggest that people with blood cancer are now accounting for a higher proportion of Covid deaths than at any point in the pandemic. According to analysis by the Office for National Statistics, a total of 458 people with blood cancer in England and Wales died of Covid between October and December 2021 – one in 20 of those who died of Covid during that time. People with blood cancer have weakened immune systems and so are less likely to be protected by vaccines.

"The lack of any joined-up plan to support the immunocompromised suggests that they have not featured prominently in the government's decision to lift the remaining Covid restrictions," said Gemma Peters, chief executive of Blood Cancer UK. "We understand we cannot keep restrictions for ever, but given the potential negative impact for immunocompromised people, it is important that the government's advisers set out the scientific basis."

Fiona Loud, policy director of Kidney Care UK, urged the government to show commitment to the nation's 500,000 immunosuppressed people by sharing their plans, and evidence for their decision-making: "Abandoning all measures without preventive treatments, free testing, and a duty not to expose immunosuppressed people to Covid-19 unnecessarily risks making us into second-class citizens."

Robin Bevan, headteacher of Southend high school for boys, said last week's announcement felt premature: "It would be much more reassuring – and also be much easier to explain to parents and to pupils – if there was a narrative rooted in science rather than a narrative rooted in libertarian aspiration."

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| | <p>Ceinwen Giles, who has reduced immunity after cancer treatment, said Johnson's announcement left her feeling excluded. "There seems to be the perception that somehow immunocompromised people are very old and very sick and it doesn't really matter. If you are old and sick, you still matter. This just means we're being shut out."</p> <p>A government spokesperson said: "Those considered clinically extremely vulnerable are advised to follow the same guidance as the general public, but consider taking extra precautions to reduce their chance of catching Covid-19. Vaccines are the best way we can protect ourselves from the virus."</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Hong Kong fears food supply disruption |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/13/hong-kong-fears-food-supply-disruption-as-covid-hits-drivers-in-worsening-outbreak |
| GIST | <p>Hong Kong authorities said supplies of vegetables and chilled poultry to the global financial hub may be temporarily disrupted after some mainland goods vehicle drivers preliminarily tested positive for Covid-19.</p> <p>Hong Kong imports 90% of its food, with the mainland its most important source, especially for fresh food.</p> <p>Consumers have already seen a shortage of some foreign imported goods, including premium seafood, due to stringent flight restrictions.</p> <p>"The mainland authorities and the (Hong Kong) government are working closely together to firm up the detailed arrangements to expedite the logistics of food supply for Hong Kong so as to make the supply situation resumes normal as soon as possible," the government said in a statement on Sunday.</p> <p>On Saturday, the city of 7.5 million people reported a record 1,514 new coronavirus infections, up from Friday's 1,325, in the biggest test yet for the Chinese territory's "dynamic zero-Covid" strategy.</p> <p>After a meeting with mainland Chinese officials across the border in Shenzhen, Hong Kong's No. 2 official, John Lee, said on Saturday that China will help the city to cope with the expanding outbreak by providing testing, treatment and quarantine capacity. He said there were no plans for a mainland-style lockdown for now.</p> <p>The measures will give Hong Kong a breathing space as medical capacity becomes stretched on all fronts, although there were no specific details of the plans and it was not clear how quickly they could be implemented.</p> <p>Hong Kong and mainland China are among few places in the world still aiming to suppress every Covid-19 outbreak, but the Omicron variant has proven tough to keep under control.</p> <p>Mainland China reported 67 new Covid cases on 12 February, down from 99 cases a day earlier, the country's national health authority said on Sunday.</p> <p>The National Health Commission said in a statement 28 cases were locally transmitted, down from 40.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Protests grow across Canada |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/13/protests-grow-across-canada-as-police-struggle-to-reopen-key-bridge |
| GIST | <p>Protesters opposed to Covid-19 vaccine mandates and other restrictions withdrew some of their vehicles from a US-Canadian border bridge on Saturday, but ramped up demonstrations in cities across Canada, including the capital, where police said they were awaiting more officers before ending what they described as an illegal occupation.</p> |

Late on Saturday police made the first arrest of a protester blocking the Ambassador Bridge linking Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, more than a day after authorities moved in seeking to end the blockade of the important trade corridor.

The tense standoff at the bridge had seemed to ease somewhat early in the day, when Canadian police persuaded demonstrators to move the trucks they had used to barricade the entrance to the busy international crossing.

But protesters reconvened nearby – with reinforcements – and were still choking off access from the Canadian side at night, snarling traffic and commerce for a sixth day.

During a meeting of his top advisers on Saturday, prime minister Justin Trudeau emphasized that border crossings could not and would not remain closed, with all options remaining on the table.

In Ottawa, the ranks of protesters swelled to the thousands as they have on past weekends, and loud music played as people milled about downtown where anti-vaccine demonstrators have been encamped since late January.

The protests at the bridge, in Ottawa and elsewhere have reverberated outside the country, with [similarly inspired convoys](#) in France, New Zealand and the Netherlands, and the US Department of Homeland Security warning that [truck convoys may be in the works](#) in the United States.

A former cabinet minister in Justin Trudeau's government took the unusual step of calling out her former federal colleagues as well as the province and city for not putting an end to the protests.

"Amazingly, this isn't just Ottawa. It's the nation's capital," Catherine McKenna tweeted. "But no one – not the city, the province or the federal government can seem to get their act together to end this illegal occupation. It's appalling ... Just get your act together. Now."

Trudeau has called the protesters a "fringe" of Canadian society, and both federal and provincial leaders say they can't order police what to do.

Ottawa mayor Jim Watson declared a state of emergency last week for the capital, where hundreds of trucks remained in front of the parliament buildings and demonstrators have set up portable toilets outside the prime minister's office, where Trudeau's motorcade usually parks.

Police issued a statement on Saturday calling the protest an unlawful occupation and saying they were waiting for police "reinforcements" before implementing a plan to end the demonstrations.

"Demonstrators exhibited aggressive behaviour towards law enforcement, including refusing to follow directions, overwhelming officers and otherwise subverting enforcement efforts," police said in a statement, according to CBC.

At the demonstrations in Windsor, a man with "Mandate Freedom" and "Trump 2024" spray-painted on his vehicle left the bridge entrance early in the day as others began dismantling a small, tarp-covered encampment. A trucker honked his horn as he, too, drove off, to cheers and chants of "Freedom!"

But hundreds more arrived to bolster the crowd and settled into a faceoff with police about two blocks away, waving flags and yelling. While there were no visible physical confrontations, the crowd still controlled the road to the bridge, and traffic had not resumed as of the evening.

Windsor police tweeted that no one had been arrested but urged people to stay away from the bridge: "We appreciate the cooperation of the demonstrators at this time and we will continue to focus on resolving the demonstration peacefully. Avoid area!"

Protester Daniel Koss said shortly before police advanced that the demonstration had succeeded in bringing attention to demands to lift Covid-19 mandates and he was happy it remained peaceful.

“It’s a win-win,” Koss said. “The pandemic is rolling down right now, they can remove the mandates, all the mandates, and everyone’s happy. The government does the right thing, and the protesters are all happy.”

The previous day, a judge ordered an end to the blockade of mostly pickup trucks and cars, and Ontario premier Doug Ford declared a state of emergency allowing for fines of \$100,000 and up to one year in jail for anyone illegally blocking roads, bridges, walkways and other critical infrastructure.

“The illegal blockades are impacting trade, supply chains & manufacturing. They’re hurting Canadian families, workers & businesses. Glad to see the Windsor Police & its policing partners commenced enforcement at and near the Ambassador Bridge,” federal innovation minister Francois-Philippe Champagne tweeted Saturday. “These blockades must stop.”

The Ambassador Bridge is the busiest US-Canadian border crossing, carrying 25% of all trade between the two countries, and auto plants on both sides have been forced to shut down or reduce production this week. The standoff came at a time when the industry is already struggling to maintain production in the face of pandemic-induced shortages of computer chips and other supply-chain disruptions.

In Ottawa, 31-year-old Stephanie Ravensbergen said she turned out to support her aunt and uncle, who have parked their truck in the streets since the beginning of the protest. She opposes vaccine and mask requirements, and said it’s important for schoolchildren to be able see their friends’ faces and emotions.

“We want the right to choose,” Ravensbergen said. “We want the right to be able to do what everybody else can do.”

Protesters on Saturday tore down a fence that authorities put up around the capital’s national war memorial two weeks ago after demonstrators urinated on it. Some later chanted “liberte,” French for “freedom.”

“Completely unacceptable,” Lawrence MacAulay, Canada’s veterans affairs minister, tweeted. “This behavior is disappointing and I’m calling on protesters to respect our monuments.”

On the other side of the country, protesters disrupted operations at another border crossing between Surrey, British Columbia, and Blaine, Washington, but officials said it was not blocked. Two other border crossings, in Alberta and in Manitoba, remained shut down as well.

But in Toronto, police again prevented protests from getting out of control there by blocking off roads and a major highway to prevent any potential convoy from getting downtown.

While the protesters are decrying vaccine mandates for truckers and other Covid-19 restrictions, many of Canada’s public health measures, such as mask rules and vaccine passports for getting into restaurants and theatres, are already falling away as the Omicron surge levels off.

Pandemic restrictions have been far stricter there than in the US, but Canadians have largely supported them. The vast majority of Canadians are vaccinated, and the Covid-19 death rate is one-third that of the United States.

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 US, Japan, SKorea united to deter NKorea |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-japan-and-south-korea-present-united-front-on-north-korea-11644730580?mod=hp_listb_pos1 |

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| GIST | <p>HONOLULU—The U.S., Japan and South Korea will strengthen their joint efforts to deter North Korea's missile activity and nuclear ambitions, while continuing to push for diplomatic engagement with Pyongyang, the allies' senior diplomats said Saturday.</p> <p>"It is clear to all of us that the DPRK is in a phase of provocation," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, using shorthand for the country's formal name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. "We condemn the recent missile launches, violations of UN Security Council resolutions."</p> <p>North Korea conducted seven weapons tests in the month of January alone—more than it had done all of last year. That includes an intermediate-range ballistic missile on Jan. 30, the most powerful weapon the Kim Jong Un regime has shown off in years. Pyongyang has signaled it could consider restarting nuclear tests or long-range missile launches.</p> <p>U.S. officials say that the administration's approach is the right one, despite North Korea's escalatory posture. The Biden administration has repeatedly offered to meet Pyongyang without preconditions at any time and anywhere. But North Korea has remained disinterested. The two sides haven't held formal talks in more than two years.</p> <p>Pointing to sanctions imposed in January against eight North Korea-linked individuals and entities, Mr. Blinken said the U.S. "will continue to hold the DPRK accountable, even as we seek to engage in diplomacy."</p> <p>South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong said the allies had reached a consensus on their condemnation of the tests, the need to deter further weapons activity by Pyongyang, and a push for diplomacy. He said continuing disagreement between South Korea and Japan over control of disputed islands and historical concerns wouldn't affect their cooperation on North Korea.</p> <p>"We are absolutely united in our approach, in our determination," Mr. Blinken said. "And that unity of purpose is, I think, vitally important to dealing with the challenge posed by the DPRK, and also pursuing a more hopeful future."</p> <p>Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi said the three officials had held "a very fruitful discussion" on the challenges posed by North Korea.</p> <p>While Mr. Chung said the allies had discussed specific measures with respect to North Korea, he declined to disclose any of them.</p> <p>The Biden administration's new Indo-Pacific strategy, released Friday, underscores the conviction that "more than any other part of the world, what happens in this region is going to shape the lives of Americans and people around the world," Mr. Blinken said.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Biden warns Putin: severe cost to invasion |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-to-talk-with-putin-as-u-s-warns-of-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-11644659540?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2 |
| GIST | <p>President Biden warned his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin of "swift and severe costs" if Russia moves against Ukraine in a phone call Saturday, as the U.S. ordered most embassy staff out of the country and Moscow also began withdrawing its diplomatic presence there.</p> <p>"President Biden was clear that, if Russia undertakes a further invasion of Ukraine, the United States together with our allies and partners will respond decisively and impose swift and severe costs on Russia," the White House said after the two leaders' hourlong call.</p> <p>The discussion didn't bring about any breakthrough and there was "no fundamental change" in the dynamic, a senior administration official said Saturday. Mr. Biden put more ideas on the table to help</p> |

persuade Mr. Putin not to invade Ukraine, but officials were mum on how those proposals were received or if any of them were new. The U.S. official said the two leaders agreed to remain engaged, regardless of whether Moscow decides to invade Ukraine or not.

The U.S. warned Friday that a [Russian military invasion could happen at any moment](#), with tens of thousands of casualties. Russia, which [has massed some 130,000 troops along Ukraine's borders](#), denies it intends to invade its neighbor.

After the call, a Kremlin aide said Russia would soon announce what actions it would take in response to the U.S. and NATO proposals. "Today's call took place during an unprecedented ratcheting up of hysteria by American officials about the supposed inevitable invasion of Russia into Ukraine," Yury Ushakov said, adding that the U.S. had again ignored Russia's central demands of rolling back the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's eastward expansion and barring weapons systems from Ukraine.

The U.S. Embassy in Ukraine said Saturday it had ordered the departure of most direct-hire employees from the country and that only a "core" group of diplomats would remain. The embassy said it would operate limited consular services out of Lviv, considered a safer location because of its proximity to the Polish border.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Russia had decided on a "certain optimization" of staffing at the Russian Embassy in Kyiv and its consulates in Kharkiv, Odessa and Lviv because it feared "certain provocations by the Kyiv regime or third nations." She said consular services would continue.

In an earlier phone call Saturday, Mr. Putin told French President Emmanuel Macron that Russia had no intention of attacking Ukraine and remained open to dialogue, according to a close aide to the French president. Mr. Macron, [who recently traveled to Moscow for talks](#), told Mr. Putin that sincere dialogue was incompatible with an escalation, according to Mr. Macron's office.

Amid the rising tensions, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged calm. "Today, panic in our country would be the best friend of our enemies," he said while visiting Interior Ministry troop exercises in Kalanchak, a Ukrainian town some 20 miles north of the Crimean Peninsula [that Russia annexed in 2014](#). "We, as a nation, must rely on our own forces. We are acting according to a plan. We are not afraid of anyone."

Ukrainian army, Interior Ministry and territorial-defense troops were training throughout the country on Saturday, just as Russian and Belarusian forces drilled across the border, and the Russian Navy carried out exercises along Ukraine's coast in the Black Sea.

In the western city of Lviv, several hundred civilians and volunteers for the new Territorial Defense brigade gathered at a shooting range overlooking the city, learning how to make improvised explosive devices, administer first aid and maneuver in small units. Some practiced with cutout wooden rifles, while others drilled how to clear a building with live-fire automatic shotguns.

In Kalanchak, units from the national police and the Ukrainian National Guard practiced subduing a group that threatened a dam restricting the water supply for Crimea, a prime target should Russia launch a full-fledged invasion. They later trained in how to retake a municipal building seized by a rebel group, simulating hybrid-warfare tactics used by Russia in 2014.

"The motivation must be not to die for Ukraine, but to kill for Ukraine," said Lt. Col. Valeriy Kurko, the commander of Lviv-based 103rd Territorial Defense brigade. Ukraine, he pointed out, [has been at war with Russian-backed troops in the eastern Donbas](#) region for eight years, with hundreds of thousands battle-hardened veterans ready to join the resistance.

"In Russia, unlike in Ukraine, the tragedy hasn't yet touched every family," Lt. Col. Kurko said. "My question is: Is the population of the Russian Federation ready to accept these casualties, to count their coffins not in the thousands but in the hundreds of thousands?"

Separately, the U.S. military said it has ordered 160 service members of the Florida National Guard, who had been training Ukrainian troops, to leave the country. The U.K. also said it is withdrawing its trainers. The two nations supplied Ukraine with more than a dozen planeloads of advanced weapons in recent weeks, including Javelin and NLAW antitank missiles. American and British trainers were teaching Ukrainian forces how to use these weapons.

“We have already gone through war and through the required training. Therefore, we are ready to greet the enemy not with flowers, but with Stingers, with Javelins and with NLAWs,” Ukrainian Armed Forces commander Lt. Gen. Valeriy Zaluzhny said in a Saturday address. “Welcome to hell!” he added in English.

Dutch national carrier [KLM](#) canceled a flight to Kyiv scheduled for Saturday evening and said [it would indefinitely halt all flights to the Ukrainian capital](#) and stop operating in Ukraine airspace amid expectations of an imminent ground invasion by Russian troops. The airline, along with others, last month started rescheduling flights so crews would be able to avoid overnight stays in the city.

Nearly 200 American diplomats are expected to leave Ukraine. The senior U.S. official said the majority of American diplomats leaving Ukraine will return to the U.S., and a small group will be relocated to various regional embassies to support staff there. Nonessential personnel and the families of American diplomats [had been ordered to leave last month](#).

The U.S. doesn’t operate a consulate in Lviv and the location where embassy staff will be working in wasn’t constructed, leased, or planned far in advance, a senior U.S. official said. The city’s mayor, Andriy Sadovy, said he expected the lease to be signed shortly. Several Western nations, such as Canada, also are relocating operations to Lviv, with the city’s hotels filling up with foreign officials.

Mr. Sadovy said the city could host an influx of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians fleeing areas in the path of the Russian advance should war erupt. “For many people, Lviv is the backup landing strip because it is a safe city,” he said. “I hope everything will be OK—but we are also preparing for a difficult life.”

Lviv is already gearing up for how to survive possible Russian airstrikes, with preparations made to keep supplying potable water even if the power grid goes down.

The White House has approved a Pentagon plan for U.S. troops in nearby Poland to help thousands of Americans likely to flee Ukraine if Russia attacks, as the Biden administration tries to avoid an evacuation similar to its chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Some of the 1,700 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division were being deployed to Poland to bolster that NATO ally with checkpoints, tent camps and other temporary facilities inside Poland’s border with Ukraine in preparation of serving arriving Americans, U.S. officials said.

The troops aren’t authorized to enter Ukraine and won’t evacuate Americans or fly aircraft missions from inside the country.

In a further sign of U.S.-Russian tensions, Russia on Saturday said a U.S. submarine violated its territorial waters near the disputed Kuril Islands in the Pacific, where Russia was conducting exercises, and summoned the U.S. military attaché to the Russian Defense Ministry in Moscow.

“There is no truth to the Russian claims of our operations in their territorial waters,” said U.S. Navy Capt. Kyle Raines, spokesman for the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Canada police begin clearing bridge |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/canada-police-prepare-to-remove-bridge-protesters-choking-off-u-s-canada-trade-11644676966?mod=hp_lead_pos3 |

Efforts by Canadian police to clear protesters blocking traffic on a crucial bridge between the U.S. and Canada appear to have stalled Saturday, as an initial crowd of roughly 50 people swelled to over 500 as of early afternoon, among them parents with children.

A row of police officers, standing side-by-side across a six-lane road, succeeded in moving protesters away from the entrance to the Ambassador Bridge, which links Windsor, Ontario, to Detroit, opening some corridors toward the bridge. However, there was still no traffic either northbound or southbound on the bridge as of early afternoon.

The crowd was [protesting Covid-19 vaccine mandates](#) and other social restrictions.

Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens said in a television interview with CTV network on Saturday afternoon that police expect to clear the protest this weekend and would do it peacefully, if possible.

“But at the end of the day, if folks are just absolutely unwilling to leave, police will have to do what is required to remove them so we can get this border crossing open,” he said.

Windsor Police Department said on Twitter that protesters who remained would be subject to arrest. “People are advised to immediately vacate the area.”

Police in France were also dealing with protests similar to those in Canada. In Paris, police on Saturday fired tear gas on the Champs Elysées and other sites across the country to disperse crowds who gathered to protest France’s Covid restrictions and vaccine requirements. Some protesters attempted to drive into the French capital in [a “Freedom Convoy.”](#) mirroring the protests in Canada. Police stopped most of those vehicles before they could enter central Paris.

In Windsor, some vehicles that were part of the bridge blockade departed early on Saturday once police arrived around 8:20 a.m. Some protesters started to take down tents that had served as makeshift kitchens.

Despite police efforts, other individuals joined the demonstrators.

When the police action began, officers walked in a line toward the protest group, forcing them to back further into Windsor. Some protesters waved Canadian flags, some sang the national anthem, “O Canada.” An armored police vehicle was on the scene, behind the officers. The movement stopped around noon, however, as police held their line against a growing crowd.

By late afternoon, the police department said on Twitter it was starting to ticket and tow vehicles parked in the area.

Business leaders, who had demanded that Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau move to end the blockade, said they welcomed the move to reopen the bridge.

“We had all hoped those obstructing trade and travel would have left of their own accord after President Biden and Prime Minister Trudeau had made clear the blockade could not be allowed to continue, but some did not. Our laws must be enforced and our borders must be secured,” said Goldy Hyder, president of the Business Council of Canada, a group that represents chief executives at the country’s biggest companies.

A representative from Canada’s border agency provided no timeline as to when the Ambassador Bridge might reopen.

A Canadian judge [granted police permission to forcibly remove the protesters](#) starting Friday evening.

The bridge, [one of the busiest border crossings in North America](#), accommodates roughly 30% of annual two-way U.S.-Canada trade, which recent U.S. data peg at more than \$600 billion.

Over \$28 billion of two-way trade in motor vehicles and auto parts was transported last year via the Ambassador Bridge, according to Statistics Canada.

Commercial trucks have been rerouted north to the Blue Water Bridge, which crosses the St. Clair River and connects Port Huron, Mich., with Sarnia, Ontario, roughly 66 miles north of the Detroit-Windsor crossing. Truckers have faced long delays in crossing the border.

“The same rule of law that guarantees the right to peaceful protest also underpins the principle of free trade and commerce,” said Flavio Volpe, president of the Automotive Parts Manufacturers’ Association. His group, along with the city of Windsor, made the joint bid to an Ontario court for an injunction. “I take no comfort in seeking a legal remedy to an illegal blockade, but I have a responsibility to honest Canadian enterprise that I take seriously.”

Mr. Trudeau said Friday that the border crossing “cannot and will not remain closed” and called on protesters to leave, saying they are taking the risk of getting a criminal record or having their drivers’ licenses revoked.

North American auto makers, including [General Motors](#) Co. , [Stellantis](#) NV, and [Ford Motor](#) Co. , [have curtailed production](#) this week and sent employees home in some cases because parts required for assembly couldn’t be delivered. Some Canadian auto-parts suppliers have also started to reduce production because they are unable to ship orders to the U.S.

“We welcome efforts by law enforcement to end the border blockades,” said Brian Kingston, president of the Canadian Vehicle Manufacturers’ Association, a lobby group that represents the Detroit-based auto makers in Canada. “The blockades continue to impact thousands of jobs on both sides of the border; cross-border trade must be restored as quickly as possible.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Police remove protesters off Canada bridge |
| SOURCE | https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/02/12/canada-covid-19-mandates-continue/3131644682221/ |
| GIST | <p>Feb. 12 (UPI) -- Police on Saturday began enforcing a judge's order to remove anti-COVID-19 mandate protesters who have blocked the Ambassador Bridge on the U.S.-Canadian border for days.</p> <p>The so-called "Freedom Convoy" protests, which initially focused on the Canadian government's vaccine mandate for cross-border truckers, expanded to a broader movement against public health measures to limit COVID-19 spread. They began in late January in Canada's capital Ottawa and returned Monday to block Ambassador Bridge connecting Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit.</p> <p>The protests have shut down the bridge, disrupting auto companies by blocking trucks from moving auto parts between the countries. The Bank of Canada warned protesters Wednesday that continuing to block the border crossing will hurt the supply chain.</p> <p>John Wiebe, a truck driver whose rig was encamped in the protest at the bridge, told CBC News he was aware that the protest was having a significant financial impact, but he indicated that it was worth it to try to prevent economic loss from COVID-19 mandates.</p> <p>"Sometimes you got to lose money to make money," Wiebe said.</p> <p>Ontario Superior Court Chief Justice Geoffrey B. Morawetz granted an injunction Friday ordering a clearing of the Ambassador Bridge.</p> <p>The injunction came into effect at 7 p.m. Friday, but police took no action as the crowd grew in size until Saturday morning when around 100 protesters remained, according to CBC.</p> |

"The Windsor Police & it's policing partners have commenced enforcement at and near the Ambassador Bridge," the police department [tweeted Saturday](#) morning. "We urge all demonstrators to act lawfully and peacefully. Commuters are still being asked to avoid the areas affected by the demonstrations at this time."

On Friday, police [issued a message warning](#) demonstrators of impending enforcement.

"The unlawful act of blocking streets at and near the Ambassador Bridge is resulting in people being denied the lawful use, enjoyment and operation of their property and causing businesses to close down," the message read. "We are providing notice that anyone blocking the streets or assisting others in the blocking of streets may be committing a criminal offense and must immediately cease further unlawful activity or you may face charges.

"You could be arrested if you are a party to the offense or assisting others in the direct or indirect commission of this offence," the warning added.

Meanwhile, unlawful convoy protests have also continued in Ottawa, where there [have been 26 arrests](#) made on criminal charges, including two additional arrests for public intoxication.

In late January, Trudeau, who was diagnosed with a breakthrough case of COVID-19, also condemned symbols of racism and violence among the anti-COVID-19 vaccine mandate protesters in the country's downtown capital who continued to block streets. He also directed those who joined the convoy, but don't support racism or violence to condemn it.

A Confederate flag, a relic from the U.S. Civil War that is associated with racist and far-right elements, and swastikas were also spotted on flags and signs during the protests.

Protesters in Ottawa also harassed staff at Shepherds of Good Hope, a homeless shelter.

Police [told CBC News](#) at the time the anti-vaccine mandate protests included protesters jumping on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, defacing of a statue of athlete Terry Fox with anti-vaccine material, and a Canadian flag being turned upside down.

"All Canadians have the right to express their opinion or their disagreement with the government, but they don't have the right to threaten or harass their fellow citizens or to spread hateful messages," Trudeau said at the time.

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Ex-Seattle mayor phone set to delete texts |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/phone-was-manually-set-to-delete-former-seattle-mayor-jenny-durkans-texts-forensic-analysis-indicates/ |
| GIST | <p>Former Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan's text messages from one of the most tumultuous periods in city history vanished because a phone setting likely was manually changed to delete texts automatically, and ex-Police Chief Carmen Best deleted her texts, a long-overdue forensic analysis has found.</p> <p>The analysis, which tried but failed to recover the texts and investigated what happened to the public records — including messages exchanged during Seattle's racial justice protests in the summer of 2020 — indicated that Durkan's texts were set in July 2020 to delete after 30 days and that Best's texts were "periodically deleted."</p> <p>"We investigated whether there were any events that could have changed [Durkan's] text message retention settings without manual intervention, and to date have not identified any that apply," a report on the analysis says.</p> |

The 52-page report, written by an expert with the California cyber security firm Unit 42 under contract with the City Attorney's Office, was released late Friday to lawyers involved in lawsuits against the city related to the 2020 protests.

The contractor did not attempt to determine who deleted Durkan's texts from her iPhone by changing the retention setting from "forever" to "30 days," the report says, because "digital forensic evidence regarding who made changes does not typically exist on mobile devices."

The analysis did determine, though, that the default retention setting should have been "forever."

Best did not respond to messages left for her Saturday.

In an email, Durkan asserted Saturday that the report supports her contention she didn't delete her text messages.

"As I have said all along, I did not change the retention settings on my phone and intentionally delete any data. The forensic report confirms my actions did not delete messages from the phone," Durkan said.

"Fortunately, the city has been able to produce the majority of texts missing from my phone by recovering them from other [people's] devices. As I stated before, I believed electronic data from all city devices was being retained and archived, including text messages."

But the analyst's report didn't determine who did or didn't manually change the settings that deleted the mayor's texts from her phone.

Durkan's email also noted that the city's information technology department "configured, issued and maintained" all of her phones, and worked on them in July 2020 "to fix different problems." The department configured a new iPhone for her on July 9, 2020, after her old iPhone had fallen into salt water on July 4, 2020.

The report found that the IT department transferred the data from Durkan's old phone directly to her new phone on July 9, 2020.

The analysis also inferred that someone selected the "disable and delete" option for storing texts from Durkan's phone on iCloud on July 4, 2020, before the IT department made the switch. A Durkan spokesperson didn't respond to a question asking whether Durkan disputed that finding, referring further questions to the city.

Durkan, whose term expired this past December, and Best, who retired in September 2020, were Seattle's most important leaders in May and June 2020, as racial justice protests erupted, police deployed tear gas and activists occupied part of Capitol Hill.

But the mayor and police chief had texts that were not retained for extended periods of time, including in those crucial months, leaving the public in the dark about some of what they discussed and what occurred during key moments. The forensic contractor couldn't find either leader's texts from May 2020 and June 2020 backed up from their phones and stored elsewhere, according to Friday's report.

The missing texts have become a point of contention in several ongoing lawsuits against the city, and a matter of public interest.

Under state law, anyone who willfully destroys a public record that's supposed to be kept is guilty of a felony. Most elected and public officials in Washington, including Durkan, are required to take public-records training, which includes information about records-retention requirements.

David Perez, a lawyer representing Black Lives Matter activists suing the city over the Police Department's crowd tactics during the 2020 protests, said in an email Saturday that while the report clearly

shows that “someone manually, and deliberately” deleted Durkan’s messages, the analysis didn’t try to find out who did it.

“The person or persons responsible should be held accountable,” Perez said. “Despite spending all that money on a fancy report, the city has not decided to ask the most basic question of all: who hit the delete button.”

In an email Saturday, a spokesperson for current Mayor Bruce Harrell said Harrell had received a copy of Friday’s report and was “seeking legal clarification from the City Attorney’s Office on what the appropriate and legal course of action should be in these circumstances.”

Spokesperson Jamie Housen added Harrell “believes any potential investigation should involve a neutral third-party investigator,” rather than Seattle police, “to prevent the appearance of a conflict of interest.”

Much of the information in Friday’s report [already had been uncovered](#) in bits and pieces over the past nine months. But the report reinforced certain aspects and added new details.

The contractor that completed the report was hired in November 2020 by lawyers working for then-City Attorney Pete Holmes to try to recover Durkan’s texts and determine why they were gone. The public didn’t find out her texts were missing until May 2021, when The Seattle Times [reported on a whistleblower](#) investigation.

The Times subsequently reported that [Best’s texts were also missing](#), along with the texts of at least seven other city officials, including members of Best’s command staff and fire Chief Harold Scoggins.

At some point, the forensic contractor’s work grew to include Best’s texts but didn’t attempt to determine what happened to the texts of the other officials.

Durkan’s office initially attributed the loss of her texts to an [“unknown technology issue”](#) but later acknowledged that her texts had been set to automatically delete after 30 days.

Neither Durkan nor anyone else has taken responsibility for selecting the 30-day setting.

Durkan has never accepted an interview request from The Times about the matter, and her office and the city’s IT department last year said they wouldn’t answer certain questions until the forensic report was complete.

Best’s account has evolved. When [asked about the matter](#) in May, Best acknowledged she had received a number of public records requests for her texts from the summer of 2020. She said she didn’t know how her texts disappeared, noting she thought her phone was being backed up.

“I turned in all my equipment when I left,” Best said. “I can’t begin to tell what happened, who had that information, where it went, all of that.”

During a sworn deposition about six months later, in November 2021, Best testified that she “deleted text messages periodically,” Friday’s report says.

The phone Best used in 2020 was never backed up to iCloud, “possibly due to a lack of available storage space,” the report added.

Forensic report

The city’s lawyers hired The Crypsis Group, now called Unit 42, to investigate Durkan’s missing texts as part of Seattle’s defense against various lawsuits that stemmed from the summer of 2020. That includes the lawsuit Perez is involved with, alleging unnecessary violence by police against protesters, and a suit filed by business owners and residents who allege damages caused by the city’s tolerance of the Capitol Hill protest zone.

As of November 2021, the city had paid the contractor more than \$400,000 for the work. Friday's report is attributed to Kevin Faulkner, who has more than 18 years of experience in digital forensics, according to the report.

The report says Durkan's texts are still missing, at least from her side of any exchanges, from Oct. 30, 2019, through June 25, 2020.

Durkan has said she switched phones on July 9, 2020, because the first phone had a cracked screen and had been "submerged in salt water" on July 4, 2020, "causing problems," Friday's report says.

Unit 42 analyzed data from Durkan's phones and from backups from various points in time. The investigation, according to Friday's report, indicated that Durkan's phone was set to "disable and delete" texts stored in iCloud on July 4, 2020.

It also inferred that Durkan's phone was set to delete texts older than 30 days at some point between July 4, 2020, and July 26, 2020. The analysis indicated that the phone was reset to store texts "forever" at some point between July 22, 2020, and July 26, 2020.

In August 2020, Durkan's phone with the cracked screen and water damage was decommissioned and reset by the IT department. The email from Durkan on Saturday noted that no backup of that phone's data was made by the IT department on July 9, 2020. According to Friday's report, an estimated 2,024 of Durkan's texts were deleted from her phone and could not be recovered, except from people she messaged with.

Unit 42 also analyzed data from phones used by Best over several years and from backups in 2017 and 2019. The investigation indicated that Best's phone, at the time she retired, was set to delete messages older than 30 days. But the analysis also indicated that Best had been deleting most of her texts more frequently than that.

Friday's report said the analysis was "consistent with (Best's) deposition testimony" that the former chief periodically deleted texts. It found "periodic deletion over time rather than a bulk deletion."

What now?

The missing texts came to light in May 2021 after a public records officer in Durkan's office filed a whistleblower complaint with the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission.

The resulting investigation found that the office's legal counsel had broken the state's public records law by excluding the mayor's missing texts from certain requests and had diverged from best practices by not informing requesters about the missing texts.

Durkan's office has been able to provide requesters with some missing texts from the summer of 2020 by retrieving them from people she was messaging with and whose texts were retained.

Texts between Durkan and Best have not been retrieved.

The public records officer who filed the whistleblower complaint and a colleague who supported her are [suing the city](#), alleging they were forced to quit their jobs in retaliation for objecting to the way the records requests were being handled.

The Times is [suing the city](#) over how Durkan's office and the Police Department handled requests by reporters, some of which were made before texts were deleted.

Perez, the lawyer for BLM activists who are also suing, noted that the report "confirms that the records were destroyed" after lawsuits had been filed.

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| | <p>“That means these records weren’t just public documents, they were critical evidence in ongoing litigation,” he said.</p> <p>When the matter became public in May 2021, a spokesperson for Holmes said the forensic report was expected to be completed by late June 2021. Instead, many months passed and Durkan left office, as did Holmes.</p> <p>Also in May 2021, several mayoral candidates spoke out about the matter. Harrell, who went on to win the November 2021 election, said Durkan should consider resigning. Colleen Echohawk, who finished third in the August 2021 primary, asked state Attorney General Bob Ferguson and King County Prosecutor Dan Satterberg to investigate.</p> <p>Ferguson’s spokesperson said at the time the AG’s office had no authority to investigate the matter, adding “that authority rests with local law enforcement.”</p> <p>Since then, Ferguson’s office has conducted a criminal investigation of a public official in a local jurisdiction at the direction of Gov. Jay Inslee. That investigation resulted in charges alleging Pierce County Sheriff Ed Troyer made false reports against a Black newspaper carrier. Ferguson’s spokesperson did not respond to messages Saturday.</p> <p>Satterberg’s office has not received the report nor a referral from any law enforcement agency about the matter, a spokesperson said Saturday. Such referrals are typically required for a case to be investigated, he said.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 WSP: Blaine commercial crossing closed |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/local/wsp-blaine-border-crossing-closed-to-commercial-traffic-because-of-freedom-convoy |
| GIST | <p>BLAINE, Wash. - Washington State Patrol says they have closed the commercial lanes of SR 543 at the Blaine border crossing into Canada Saturday because of the "Freedom Convoy" protests in Canada.</p> <p>A spokesperson with WSP says they are currently directing commercial traffic to the Sumas crossing, however non-commercial traffic is still allowed to cross the border in Blaine.</p> <p>WSP did not say how long the Blaine border crossing will be closed to commercial traffic.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 CDC: booster effectiveness wanes in 4mo. |
| SOURCE | https://www.cnbc.com/2022/02/11/covid-booster-effectiveness-wanes-after-4-months-but-still-provides-protection-study-shows.html |
| GIST | <p>An early look at the performance of Covid-19 booster shots during the recent omicron wave in the U.S. showed a decline in effectiveness against severe cases, though the shots still offered strong protection.</p> <p>The report, published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday, is considered an early and limited look at the durability of booster protection during the omicron surge that exploded in December and January but has been fading in recent weeks.</p> <p>The researchers looked at patient visits to hospitals and urgent care centers in 10 states. They estimated how well the booster prevented Covid-related visits to emergency departments and urgent care centers, and how well the vaccines prevented hospitalizations.</p> <p>About 10% of people in the study were boosted. Vaccine effectiveness was higher in people who had received boosters than in people who had received only the original series of shots.</p> |

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| | <p>But researchers also found that during the time that the omicron variant has been predominant, vaccine effectiveness against outpatient visits was 87% in people who had gotten a booster two months earlier, but to 66% at four months after. Vaccine effectiveness against hospitalization fell from 91% at two months to 78% by the fourth month.</p> <p>Those results, however, were based on only a small number of patients — fewer than 200 — who had been boosted four months earlier at the time of the omicron wave. And it's unclear if those people had gotten boosters early for medical reasons that may have made them more vulnerable to severe illness.</p> <p>Health experts expect protection from the vaccines to wane. The U.S. booster campaign was based on evidence that emerged last year that vaccine protection was fading months after people got their initial vaccinations.</p> <p>Still, that kind of finding was unforeseen, said Dr. William Schaffner, a Vanderbilt University vaccines expert.</p> <p>"I'm a little surprised, according to the data, that it's starting to wane already," he said, adding that he would have anticipated higher estimates of vaccine effectiveness at the four-month post-booster mark.</p> <p>But Schaffner also said he'd like to see more research about the durability of booster protection, adding "let's take this with a grain of salt."</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Somalia: hungry, desperate flee to capital |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/fleeing-drought-hunger-thousands-trek-somalias-capital-82842130 |
| GIST | <p>MOGADISHU, Somalia -- Sitting under the hot sun, hungry women and children await food aid in a camp on the outskirts of Somalia's capital, Mogadishu. They have walked for days, fleeing the drought now ravaging a large part of rural Somalia.</p> <p>Their growing ranks are expected to swell further in the coming months as the Horn of Africa region faces its worst drought conditions in a decade.</p> <p>This week the United Nations World Food Program warned that 13 million people in the region, including parts of Ethiopia and Kenya, face severe hunger in the first quarter of 2022. Immediate assistance is needed to avoid a major humanitarian crisis, the agency warned. The Horn of Africa has long been vulnerable to drought and hunger conditions often exacerbated by armed violence.</p> <p>Somalia's government in November declared a state of humanitarian emergency due to the drought, with the worst affected parts including the south-central areas of Lower Jubba, Geddo and Lower Shabelle regions.</p> <p>"The impact on families is being felt more severely this season due to the result of multiple, prolonged droughts in quick succession, a worsening security situation, desert locust infestations, soaring food prices, reduced remittances — and less money committed by donors," the aid group Save the Children said earlier this week of the drought in Somalia.</p> <p>A survey in November covering 15 of Somalia's 18 regions found the "majority of families were now going without meals on a regular basis," it said in a statement.</p> <p>In Somalia, 250,000 people died from hunger in 2011, when the U.N. declared a famine in some parts of the country. Half of them were children.</p> <p>WFP has said it needs \$327 million to look after the immediate needs of 4.5 million people over the next six months, including in Somalia.</p> |

Somali leaders also have been trying to mobilize local support, and many have responded.

A task force set up earlier this month by Prime Minister Mohamed Roble collects and distributes donations from the business community as well as Somalis in the diaspora. Some of what they give feeds hundreds of families residing in camps such as Ontorley, home to about 700 families.

“There are not (many) humanitarian agencies operating on the ground and these people urgently need support and assistance such as shelter, food, water and good sanitation,” said Abdullahi Osman, head of the charitable Hormuud Salaam Foundation and a member of the prime minister's drought task force. He more assistance is needed for the thousands of families living in camps for displaced people.

About five to 10 desperate families arrive at Ontorley camp each day, according to camp leader Nadiifa Hussein.

Faduma Ali said she hiked more than 500 kilometers (310 miles) from her home in Saakow, a town in Middle Jubba province, to Mogadishu.

“The problems I face are all due to the drought,” she told The Associated Press. “We had no water and our livestock had perished and when I lost everything, I walked the road for seven days.”

Amina Osman, a visibly emaciated woman also from Saakow, said two women with them on their journey to Mogadishu died from hunger along the way.

“We came across many hardships, including lack of water and food,” said the mother of four. “We trekked all the way from our village to this settlement. We spent eight days on the road.”

More patients with acute malnutrition are arriving at Mogadishu's Martino Hospital, and some have died, said director Dr. Abdirizaq Yusuf. Malnutrition patients are treated free of charge, he said.

“Due to the increased cases of acute malnutrition, the hospital now employs specialist doctors and nutritionists who help those most affected,” he said. “A large number are from remote regions of Somalia and now live in (displaced people's) camps.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Rash of auto recalls questions electric cars |
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| SOURCE | https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/11/rash-auto-recalls-raises-questions-about-safety-el/ |
| GIST | <p>A recent flurry of automobile recalls is raising new safety concerns, including questions about the reliability of Tesla's electric vehicles.</p> <p>Hundreds of thousands of Tesla, Hyundai, Kia, Porsche and Audi vehicles have been recalled this week. But Tesla, the nation's largest maker of electric cars and SUVs, is drawing the most attention from safety watchdogs and government regulators after allegedly dodging concerns for years.</p> <p>“If a company is pushing safety limits, then the government should fine it,” said William Wallace, manager of safety policy for the nonprofit safety watchdog Consumer Reports. “But Tesla finally seems to be taking responsibility for issues we have known about for a while.”</p> <p>Tesla said Thursday it was recalling 579,000 of its 2020-2022 Model X, S and Y cars in the U.S. after learning that sounds from their “Boombox” function can override the pedestrian warnings that federal law requires for electric cars. The Texas-based electric car company cited a December 2020 software update for the recall, which also includes some 2017-2022 Model 3 vehicles.</p> <p>That marks the fourth recall Tesla has announced in the past two weeks, two of them software-related and the other two stemming from violations of federal motor safety standards.</p> |

Tesla has issued 15 recalls for hundreds of thousands of cars from all of its models since January 2021 — ranging from defective seat belt chimes to “Full Self-Driving” software that allowed vehicles to roll through stop signs without halting — according to National Highway Traffic Safety Administration records.

A NHTSA spokesperson told The Washington Times in an emailed statement that government regulators initiated conversations with Tesla in response to customer complaints.

“After receiving complaints from consumers about defrosters not clearing windshields in select Tesla vehicles, NHTSA immediately began discussions with Tesla about the issue,” the spokesperson said. “Tesla launched a recall after it determined that a software issue in some new vehicles caused heat pump malfunctions preventing proper operation of required windshield defrosting and defogging systems, making the affected vehicles non-compliant with federal motor vehicle safety standards.”

Tesla, which reportedly has disbanded its media relations department, did not respond to a request for comment. The company produced 930,422 vehicles in 2021 and is testing its assisted-driving software in 60,000 vehicles, according to a quarterly earnings report released last week.

Business consultant Hans Dau, CEO of the Mitchell Madison Group, said the spike in recalls could stem from manufacturers such as Tesla cutting corners during the supply chain crisis.

“Vehicle recalls may be related to automakers scrambling to scale production rapidly and potentially substituting parts based on availability in the global supply chain,” Mr. Dau said. “Tesla seems to be in a particularly tough spot.”

Mr. Dau pointed to a report last month from the TUV association — the agency that performs all government-required car inspections in Germany — that included electric cars for the first time. It found that Tesla Model S, BMW i3, Renault Zoe and Smart For Two Electric Drive (now EQ ForTwo) commonly had problems with their brakes, lights, wishbones and axle suspensions.

“In Germany, where all vehicles over three years must be inspected by certified TUV association inspectors according to government standards, Tesla’s Model S fared particularly poorly, ranking 126 out of 128 vehicles with an average defect rate of 11.7% compared to 4.7% for BMW’s i3 and around 2% for the top five non-electric vehicles,” Mr. Dau said.

That means that while the other three electric vehicles had average test results, more than 10% of Tesla’s electric cars failed their first inspections in Germany, the testing agency found.

Teslas also have been recalled in Europe because of problems with seats, seat belts, front suspension control, braking issues and touch screens.

But Tesla is not the only automaker struggling with recent recalls. NHTSA reports 66 U.S. automobile recalls this year — including four from Kia/Hyundai and two from Porsche/Audi.

Korean manufacturers Hyundai and Kia announced Tuesday that they were recalling 485,000 popular vehicles because their engines could catch fire even when turned off. Also on Tuesday, Volkswagen USA issued a second recall for 31,058 Audis and 1,242 Porsches struggling with rear-axle alignment problems that the company had tried to correct in a first recall last year.

Volkswagen USA did not respond to a request for comment.

Hyundai, which owns a large share of Kia, said it has recommended that owners park their vehicles “outside and away from structures” so they do not catch fire while recall notices are mailed.

“When a safety-related defect is identified, we act swiftly and efficiently to recall the vehicle and fix the problem at no cost to affected customers,” Hyundai spokesman Michael Stewart said.

He added that Hyundai was “not aware of any crashes or injuries” related to the fire problem that stems from the vehicles’ anti-lock braking system.

Mr. Wallace, the Consumer Reports safety specialist, said half of this year’s recalls stem from “typical things” like brake lights on older models and the other half from long-standing consumer complaints — like the Kia/Hyundai fires and Tesla issues — that haven’t been addressed before.

“It’s unclear to me how much the recent recalls are connected to supply chain challenges or to the companies’ unique circumstances,” Mr. Wallace said. “We’re hearing from auto companies that they’ve had to make hard choices sometimes and it affects what systems they put in their vehicles.”

General Motors, the nation’s largest automobile manufacturer, has issued one recall this year, for a rear-wheel-drive shaft assembly failure affecting 1,789 GMC and Chevrolet SUVs from 2021.

While NHTSA reported that GM recalled 8 million vehicles last year, a spokesman told the Times that 6 million of them related to Takata passenger airbags in certain 2007-2014 Chevrolet and GMC full-size trucks and SUVs — a battle the company lost after several years of appeals.

Without those 6 million recalls, he said, the company has consistently recalled about 2 million vehicles a year for the past three to four years.

“In 2021, GM had several safety recalls,” said Daniel Flores, GM’s manager of corporate news relations. “Most were small in nature in terms of vehicle volume.”

GM implemented a new safety reporting system and field investigation team following a 2014 ignition switch recall, he added.

Joe Young, director of media relations for the nonprofit Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, said the recent flurry of recalls should give consumers pause.

“We encourage consumers to take safety recalls seriously and check the VIN on used cars for open recalls,” Mr. Young said. “A lot of things should inform their buying decisions, including safety inspections.”

As for Tesla, economist Peter Earle, a research fellow at the libertarian American Institute for Economic Research in Massachusetts, said the personality of CEO Elon Musk may be adding to its challenges.

“These kinds of issues are not irregular or out of character for a new, rapidly growing firm — especially one attempting to innovate in as hidebound and regulated industry as autos are,” Mr. Earle said. “But the high profile and outspoken nature of Tesla’s founder, Elon Musk, ensures that these typical errors and growing pains will be imbued with unnecessary political overtones.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Judge blocks federal climate-change order |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/11/federal-judge-puts-brakes-bidens-climate-change-or/ |
| GIST | <p>A federal judge on Friday blocked the Biden administration’s effort to adopt a social cost on carbon and other greenhouse gases, handing a win to 10 Republican attorneys general who accused the president of overstepping his authority.</p> <p>U.S. District Court Judge James D. Cain Jr. granted a preliminary injunction shutting down implementation of President Biden’s executive order that requires federal agencies to estimate the societal costs of various emissions in the name of fighting climate change.</p> |

The Interagency Working Group on the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases agreed in February 2021 to approve an interim value of \$51 per metric ton of emissions, the same metric used by the Obama administration.

Judge Cain, a Trump appointee, said the 10 energy-producing states “have sufficiently identified the kinds of harms to support injunctive relief,” citing their arguments that the Biden administration had run afoul of the Administrative Procedure Act and imposed costs on state governments involved in cooperative federalism programs.

“As previously noted, the SC-GHG estimates will harm plaintiff states’ ability to purchase affordable energy to carry out their sovereign functions as the directive to use the SC-GHG estimates will significantly drive up costs while simultaneously significantly decrease states’ revenues,” the judge said in his 44-page order.

He emphasized that his decision to issue the injunction pending the outcome of the lawsuit had nothing to do with the merits of the climate-change debate.

“The court has the authority to enjoin federal agencies from implementing a rule — mandated by an executive order or not — that violates the APA or violates the separation of powers clause,” Judge Cain said. “Importantly, the court is not opining as to the scientific issues regarding greenhouse gas emissions, their effects on the environment, or whether they contribute to global warming.”

Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry applauded the ruling, calling it a blow to “the left’s radical, self-defeating green agenda.”

“Biden’s attempt to control the activities of the American people and the activities of every business from Main Street to Wall Street has been halted today,” Mr. Landry said. “Biden’s executive order was an attempt by the government to take over and tax the people based on winners and losers chosen by the government.”

The Trump administration had dropped the estimate to \$1 to \$7 and disbanded the Interagency Working Group, which was reinstated by Mr. Biden in his executive order issued the first day of his presidency.

“An accurate social cost is essential for agencies to accurately determine the social benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions when conducting cost-benefit analyses of regulatory and other actions,” Mr. Biden stated in his order dated Jan. 20, 2021.

The judge’s ruling prohibits the administration from “adopting, employing, treating as binding, or relying upon any Social Cost of Greenhouse Gas estimates based on global effects or that otherwise fails to comply with applicable law.”

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

Mr. Landry said the effort to determine or impose a social cost on emissions jeopardizes the manufacturing, energy and agricultural sectors.

“While our fight is far from over, I am pleased the court granted preliminary relief against the president’s unacceptable and unauthorized executive overreach; and I remain committed to seeing this case through to the end — fighting every step of the way for the workers and job creators in Louisiana and throughout our republic,” Mr. Landry said.

The other states bringing the lawsuit are Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, South Dakota, Texas, West Virginia and Wyoming.

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| SOURCE | https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/12/pentagon-moves-us-troops-out-ukraine/ |
| GIST | <p>The Pentagon has ordered U.S. military advisers stationed in Ukraine to depart as the Biden administration warns that a Russian invasion of the country is increasingly imminent.</p> <p>Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin ordered the temporary repositioning of 160 members of the Florida National Guard to other countries in Europe, Pentagon press secretary John F. Kirby said Saturday.</p> <p>“The Secretary made this decision out of an abundance of caution — with the safety and security of our personnel foremost in mind — and informed by the State Department’s guidance on U.S. personnel in Ukraine,” Mr. Kirby said.</p> <p>He said the repositioning “does not signify a change in our determination to support Ukraine’s Armed Forces, but will provide flexibility in assuring allies and deterring aggression.”</p> <p>The troops, who are assigned to the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, have been in Ukraine since late November as part of the Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine.</p> <p>The order comes just hours before President Biden’s high-stakes phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin.</p> <p>The State Department earlier Saturday ordered all non-emergency employees at the U.S. embassy in Kyiv, Ukraine to evacuate as the Biden administration warns that a Russian invasion of the country is increasingly imminent.</p> <p>“Despite the reduction in diplomatic staff, the core embassy team, our dedicated Ukrainian colleagues, and @StateDept and U.S. personnel around the world will continue relentless diplomatic and assistance efforts in support of Ukraine’s security, democracy, and prosperity,” the State Department said in a tweet.</p> <p>Consulate services at the embassy, including passport, visa, or routine service, will also be suspended, the State Department said in a follow-up advisory. A small “consular presence” in Lviv, Ukraine will be open to handle emergencies, the advisory said.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 European diplomacy avert war in Ukraine? |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/12/ukraine-macron-scholz-johnson/ |
| GIST | <p>PARIS — It was a week of mad-dash diplomacy for European leaders, a dramatic shift after two years in which the pandemic halted most international travel.</p> <p>French President Emmanuel Macron hit Moscow, Kyiv and Berlin. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson met with the head of NATO in Brussels, then flew to visit British troops deployed in Poland. And new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz made his first official trip to Washington and plans to visit Kyiv and Moscow next week.</p> <p>Macron, Johnson and Scholz are trying to prove themselves on the world stage and send specific signals to their domestic constituents. But they also share the same overarching goal: to stop a looming ground war involving Russia on the European continent.</p> <p>Whether they will succeed is unclear. Many European governments had made a deliberate choice to keep their embassy staffs in Ukraine while other countries were evacuating some of theirs in the past days and weeks. But as U.S. officials warned Friday that Putin could invade Ukraine within the week, one country after another told its nationals to leave immediately.</p> <p>When Russia last invaded Ukraine, in 2014, it was German Chancellor Angela Merkel, with her fluent Russian and more than a decade of experience in dealing with Vladimir Putin, who naturally took the lead in shepherding a European response with sanctions. And it was Merkel and French President François</p> |

Hollande who eventually brokered a peace deal with the Minsk Agreement. But now, as Europe faces its first security crisis since Merkel's departure in December, the absence of her influence is being felt.

Olaf Scholz tries to find his footing

Although Scholz is only a few months into the job, being chancellor of the European Union's most populous nation and biggest economy automatically conveys clout. His approach has often mirrored Merkel's cautious style, and as her finance minister and vice chancellor, he built a reputation as a steady hand during crises.

But the standoff over Ukraine has been a high-stakes test for the new leader.

His coalition government has struggled to agree on a joint approach — on the tone to take with Moscow, on potential sanctions, on whether the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline between Russia and Germany should be used as leverage. In a leaked cable, the German ambassador in Washington, Emily Haber, warned Berlin that it was increasingly being perceived in the United States as an “unreliable partner,” *Der Spiegel* reported.

Scholz's flurry of diplomacy is no doubt aimed, in part, to counter that impression. At a news conference at the White House on Monday, he said that his country was “absolutely united” with the United States and other NATO allies and asserted that “we will not be taking different steps.” Still, he avoided making any direct statements about Nord Stream 2. It was Biden who delivered the forceful message: “If Russia invades, that means tanks or troops crossing the border of Ukraine again, there will be no longer Nord Stream 2. We will bring an end to it.”

Some in Merkel's camp have drawn a contrast between Scholz's performance and the former chancellor's studied competence. It would be good “if Olaf Scholz consulted Angela Merkel,” said Markus Söder, the head of the smaller sister party of Scholz and Merkel's Christian Democrats.

Germany's new chancellor just needs time to find his feet, said Wolfgang Ischinger, a former German ambassador to the United States and the chairman of the Munich Security Conference.

“I'm sure Olaf Scholz regrets more than anyone else that he had to start his mission at a moment of extreme international attention,” Ischinger said.

He noted that when Macron was elected to the French presidency in 2017, he was the “new kid on the block,” while Merkel had already served for about a decade.

“She knew everybody around the world, and she was known to everyone around the world,” he said. “And Emmanuel Macron had to make his first phone calls. That creates an unequal relationship for a while.”

The Ukraine crisis is likely to explode or be resolved before Scholz is able to make those connections.

Emmanuel Macron as Putin's interlocutor

Long overshadowed on the international stage by Merkel, Macron has claimed a central role in negotiations between Ukraine and Russia. He has been pushing for a diplomatic resolution through what is known as “Normandy Format” talks — involving France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia. And in addition to his 5½-hour meeting with Putin in Moscow, he has spoken to the Russian leader multiple times by phone in recent days, including for more than an hour on Saturday.

“It's a moment of war and peace, a moment of history that's happening in Europe — and he cherishes these moments, when he thinks everything is at stake, and he wants to get involved,” said Joseph de Weck, the author of a book on Macron.

De Weck added: “I think he would act exactly the same way” if there wasn't a French presidential election in two months.

When he met with Putin on Monday, Macron struck a conciliatory tone that surprised some observers. He called Russia a “friend” and asserted: “There’s no security for the Europeans if there is no security for Russia.”

Some observers raised questions about whether Macron might be going rogue. And it is true that he wants Europe to stake out greater independence from the United States on security issues. But he has been consulting regularly with President Biden and with his European allies. On both sides of the Atlantic, there seems to be a concerted effort to avoid the sort of surprise and anger that followed the Biden administration’s move to share sensitive nuclear-powered submarine technology with Australia, which effectively canceled an earlier agreement between Australia and France.

Macron also followed his Moscow meeting by issuing a joint declaration with Scholz and Polish President Andrzej Duda, warning that “any further military aggression by Russia against Ukraine will have massive consequences and severe costs.”

On Saturday, he told Putin “sincere dialogue was not compatible with escalation,” according to the French government summary of the call.

“Macron dreams of repeating the feat of Nicolas Sarkozy,” said Marc Endeweld, the author of several books on French foreign policy and Macron. When Sarkozy was president in 2008, he managed a diplomatic resolution of the crisis between Georgia and Russia. Endeweld noted that then, as now, France held the rotating six-month presidency of the European Union.

French government officials have been eager to convey that Macron’s efforts are helpful. In a briefing with journalists, a senior French official recalled Putin’s saying that Macron is “the only one with whom he could have such in-depth discussions.”

But as Emre Peker of the Eurasia Group noted in a risk-assessment memo: “The Kremlin also made clear after the Macron-Putin meeting that the US is Russia’s primary dialogue partner on European security.”

Boris Johnson sets out to prove himself and ‘Global Britain’

The departure of Britain from the European Union has made it harder for the country to claim the title of leader of Europe. But that didn’t stop Johnson from boasting that he and his government were “bringing the West together” on Ukraine.

Britain undoubtedly plays an outsize role in military support for Ukraine. It has supplied 2,000 antitank weapons, provided training for 22,000 Ukrainian soldiers and committed \$110 million to bolster the Ukrainian navy.

Johnson has emphasized that British soldiers will not fight in Ukraine. But he is sending 350 Royal Marines to Poland. And when meeting with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg this week, the prime minister said he offered to double the British troop numbers in Estonia, deploy more Royal Air Force jets to southern Europe and dispatch a destroyer and offshore patrol vessel to the eastern Mediterranean.

Johnson said this was “probably the most dangerous moment” in what he described as “the biggest security crisis Europe has faced for decades.”

What’s behind Boris Johnson’s boast he’s leading the West on Ukraine

For Johnson’s government, the Ukraine crisis offers an opportunity to prove that post-Brexit Britain is still a force to be reckoned with on the global stage.

The country’s withdrawal from the E.U. limited its opportunities to be a transatlantic bridge. But Britain remains one of the dominant military powers in NATO and Europe, alongside the United States and France, and is a member of the “Five Eyes” intelligence alliance.

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| | <p>Britain isn't reliant on Russian natural gas as some European countries are. It gets about half of its gas from domestic fields in the North Sea, and it imports about a third from Norway.</p> <p>That "allows Britain a margin of freedom, of maneuverability," said Jonathan Eyal, associate director at the Royal United Services Institute in London.</p> <p>But critics say the British government's tough talk is undermined by the fact that London has long been a playground for Russian oligarchs, who pour billions of dollars into the property market.</p> <p>Johnson's ability to devote himself to the Ukraine crisis also is constrained by his situation at home in Britain. On Friday, he received a questionnaire from Scotland Yard, signaling that he is among those personally being investigated for participating in parties that may have violated pandemic lockdown rules.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Pentagon sending more troops to Poland |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/11/world/europe/us-troops-poland.html |
| GIST | <p>The Pentagon on Friday ordered 3,000 additional troops to Poland, bringing to 5,000 the total number of reinforcements sent to Europe in the past two weeks.</p> <p>The purpose of the troops, nearly all from the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, N.C., will be to reassure NATO allies that while the United States has no intention of sending troops into Ukraine, where President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has been threatening an invasion, President Biden would protect America's NATO allies from any Russian aggression.</p> <p>Poland borders Ukraine, Russia and Belarus, a close ally of Russia.</p> <p>The troop deployment announced on Friday will depart Fort Bragg over the next couple of days and is expected to be in place by early next week, the Pentagon said in a statement.</p> <p>The troops are commanded by Maj. Gen. Christopher Donahue, the head of the 82nd Airborne, who was also the ground commander for the evacuation at Kabul International Airport in August.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 In Ottawa protests: where were the police? |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/12/world/americas/canada-truck-protests-police.html |
| GIST | <p>OTTAWA — A two-minute walk from Canada's Parliament buildings, hundreds of people danced in an intersection that has been barricaded on all four corners by the metal snouts of tractor-trailers. A D.J. worked under a tent, surrounded by giant speakers buzzing with reverb. When a small group of police officers decked in masks and protective headphones made their way across the makeshift dance floor, cheers echoed through the crowd.</p> <p>Only a few hours earlier on Friday, the premier of Ontario, home to Canada's capital, Ottawa, declared a state of emergency across the province and said that anyone involved in the protest would face "severe" consequences, including nearly \$100,000 fines or even jail time.</p> <p>On Saturday the Canadian police began an operation to clear trucks from the Ambassador Bridge, a vital crossing in Windsor, Ontario connecting the United States and Canada. The blockage had left carmakers short of critical parts, forcing some to shutter some plants in both countries on Friday, and inspired discussion of copycat protests in the U.S. and France.</p> <p>But the Ottawa police still were not issuing tickets or making arrests.</p> <p>"They've taken an oath to protect our country," said Terry Grein, a protester in the crowd, after bumping fists with one of the officers. "A civil servant will not go against watching people being unified."</p> |

Two weeks after Ottawa's downtown was transformed into a [raging tailgate party](#), many in Canada wonder how this happened — why the police seemingly abandoned the country's seat of power, with no perceivable backup, and how a motley group of truckers, anti-government activists, anti-vaccine agitators and people just fed up after two years of stringent public health restrictions have managed not only to outfox them, but to become increasingly entrenched and to spread elsewhere.

"This is [Jan. 6](#) in slow motion," said Catherine McKenney, an Ottawa city councilor, who uses the pronouns they/them, referring to the Jan. 6, 2021, [mob assault on the United States Capitol](#). Mx. Kenney has been bellowing for more police protection for the city's residents downtown, who feel terrorized by pickup trucks that circle through, delivering supplies to the parked trucks. "But on Jan. 7, 2021, Washington emptied out," the councilor said. "Here, they stayed."

The answers will surface in a post-mortem, but initially, analysts link the police officers' hands-off approach to two opposing factors: the weaknesses of the local police force in size and preparation, and the relative strength of the occupiers — in numbers, but also in tactics, discipline, fund-raising ability and logistics.

While the trucks themselves are the purported cause, symbol and tool of the protest, only a few of the self-proclaimed leaders are actually truckers. Some are, in fact, former police officers and army veterans who many believe have used their expertise to help organize the occupation.

"This is an entirely sophisticated level of demonstrators," Ottawa's police chief, Peter Sloly, said [in a news conference on Thursday](#). "They have the capability to run a strong organization here, provincially and nationally, and we're seeing that play out in real time."

The trucks began roaring into the city on Jan. 28, spurred by new federal regulations requiring truckers crossing into Canada from the United States to be vaccinated against the coronavirus. But the scope of their demands was more expansive, calling for removing all pandemic restrictions in Canada, and they called on [Parliament to dissolved and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to be removed from office](#).

City councilors briefed by the police were told to expect an exceptionally large convoy that would be disruptive — and loud — but most likely temporary.

"The overall sentiment at the point: By late Sunday or Monday, it would move on," Mx. McKenney said.

Instead, the trucks parked in tight groups along many streets downtown, including on the graceful boulevard that passes before the country's august Parliament buildings, Supreme Court and political offices, including the prime minister's. And they never left.

The police did not put down concrete barriers to keep the trucks a safe distance from the legislature, nor did they ensure that the downtown core would not be converted into a parking lot — until days later, and then only to stop further expansion.

It was only at that point that everyone understood how a 30,000-pound tractor-trailer that a trucker may live in for days at a time while on the job could be converted into a strategic tool of protest — huge and immovable, equipped with a heater and a bed, and with a built-in, ear-shattering noise maker.

"It had to do with a failure of imagination," said Michael Kempa, an associate professor of criminology at the University of Ottawa who studies policing across Canada. "It was outside our frame of experience because of that failure."

It was not just that the trucks were immovable. The police were also greatly outnumbered and outflanked. In some cases, the truckers removed their tires and bled their brake lines to make their trucks immovable, the police said. And some heavy duty towing companies have refused to work with the police to remove the trucks, Mr. Sloly said, as some have been threatened and others are sympathetic to the truckers, who are their major clients.

Ottawa is a small city, with about one million residents, and has a police force to match, with fewer than 1,500 officers. That comes to one officer for every 667 residents, a far cry from New York City, with one officer for every 233 people.

A week into the occupation the police reported that they had moved their shifts around, managing to put 150 officers on the streets in three of the most affected neighborhoods over the course of a day, and swearing in new federal officers sent to help.

At that time, Chief Sloly said, there were about 5,000 protesters settled into the city's core.

The mayor declared an emergency and Chief Sloly requested an additional 1,800 police officers. But still, there were too few officers to handle the crowds. While trying to make an arrest, some of his officers were swarmed.

On Friday, Mr. Trudeau — whose name linked to a popular epithet has become the unofficial slogan of the occupation, written on knit caps, hats, flags, handwritten signs and the side of a giant truck stationed squarely in front of the gates to Parliament — rejected calls to order the military to clear the city's streets or some of the border crossings into the United States that had been blocked by similar convoys.

Over that time, money to support the convoy in Ottawa — much of it from the United States — has poured in. The organizers have held regular news conferences in hotel rooms, for the media outlets they deem trustworthy. They sent a lawyer to court to represent them in a nascent class action suit.

And they got organized, setting up street captains who reported to block captains. Together, they distribute food and supplies to sustain the protesters and, most important, deliver diesel to the trucks in jerrycans. As of last weekend that was deemed a crime, but it continues unabated.

On Monday, when a local court imposed a 10-day prohibition on honking, the more than 400 trucks barricading dozens of blocks suddenly went silent — revealing both an adept communications network and notable discipline, said Regina Bateson, an assistant professor of public and international affairs at the University of Ottawa.

"They've been given this amazing gift of time by the authorities here," said Ms. Bateson, who studies political violence, collective activism and populism. "With that time, they have formed relationships, they've gone out and partied together. It's actually important — that's how groups form cohesion."

She added, "That gives them the trust and confidence to go into combat together."

A 15-minute drive from downtown, one of the occupation's command centers has been set up in the stadium parking lot of the Ottawa Titans, a minor-league baseball club.

A half-dozen large white tents have been built, with electricity and heat pumping into them. Inside one, cooks offer hot dogs and soup to dozens of people sitting at tables, surrounded by donations of toothpaste, toilet paper and juice. In another, deemed the office, volunteers check in to pick up money or get their marching orders. A couple of white boards offer services not normally associated with protests — the numbers for a mechanic, an electrician and a person with keys to a cage of propane tanks out back near piles of wood. Portable toilets and two saunas — their chimneys leaking smoke — sit near by.

"This looks like more than just some friends of truckers who showed up in Ottawa," said Christian Leuprecht, a professor of political science at both the Royal Military College of Canada and Queen's University in Kingston. "These are people who were very determined, very organized, very well resourced and very well led."

Some of the convoy's leaders have military or policing backgrounds that many analysts say have helped shape their strategy and planning. The group's proclaimed head of protective intelligence, Tom Quiggin,

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| | <p>was an intelligence officer for the Canadian military, cabinet office and federal police. Another was a former police officer attached to the prime minister's security detail.</p> <p>"They know exactly what the tactics are that police are going to use," said Mr. Leuprecht, who studies national security, terrorism and international crime.</p> <p>Two weeks after the first trucks arrived, some of the extra forces that Chief Sloy had been begging for, drawn from around Ontario, have appeared on the streets, sometimes in large groups. But still, they remain greatly outnumbered and inactive. Groups of protesters wheel jerrycans in wagons past them, honk their truck horns in time with the music as people dance and remain squarely parked on the street.</p> <p>Former military and police officers have also made public pleas for recruitment this week — for the convoy.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 US discloses Russia next possible moves |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/12/us/politics/russia-information-putin-biden.html |
| GIST | <p>WASHINGTON — After decades of getting schooled in information warfare by President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, the United States is trying to beat the master at his own game.</p> <p>In recent weeks, the Biden administration has detailed the movement of Russian special operation forces to Ukraine's borders, exposed a Russian plan to create a video of a faked atrocity as a pretext for an invasion, outlined Moscow's war plans, warned that an invasion would result in possibly thousands of deaths and hinted that Russian officers had doubts about Mr. Putin.</p> <p>Then, on Friday, Jake Sullivan, President Biden's national security adviser, told reporters at the White House that the United States was seeing signs of Russian escalation and that there was a "credible prospect" of immediate military action. Other officials said the announcement was prompted by new intelligence that signaled an invasion could begin as soon as Wednesday.</p> <p>All told, the extraordinary series of disclosures — unfolding almost as quickly as information is collected and assessed — has amounted to one of the most aggressive releases of intelligence by the United States since the Cuban missile crisis, current and former officials say.</p> <p>It is an unusual gambit, in part because Mr. Biden has repeatedly made clear he has no intention of sending U.S. troops to defend Ukraine. In effect, the administration is warning the world of an urgent threat, not to make the case for a war but to try to prevent one.</p> <p>The hope is that disclosing Mr. Putin's plans will disrupt them, perhaps delaying an invasion and buying more time for diplomacy, or even giving Mr. Putin a chance to reconsider the political, economic and human costs of an invasion.</p> <p>At the same time, Biden administration officials said they had a narrower and more realistic goal: They want to make it more difficult for Mr. Putin to justify an invasion with lies, undercutting his standing on the global stage and building support for a tougher response.</p> <p>Intelligence agencies, prodded by the White House, have declassified information, which in turn has been briefed to Congress, shared with reporters and discussed by Pentagon and State Department spokesmen.</p> <p>But the disclosures are complicated by history. Before the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Bush administration released intelligence that officials said justified pre-emptive action, including purported intercepts of Iraqi military conversations, photos of mobile biological weapons labs and statements accusing Baghdad of building a fleet of drones to launch a chemical attack on the United States. The material was all wrong, reliant on sources who lied, incorrect interpretations of Iraq's actions and senior officials who looked at raw intelligence and saw what they wanted to see.</p> |

But this situation, American officials say, is very different. Washington's claims about Russia's troop buildup have been [confirmed by commercial satellite imagery](#) of a quality previously unavailable. The details of Moscow's secret disinformation plots are in line with the Kremlin's propaganda campaigns that play out on social media platforms and [have been tracked by independent researchers](#).

Most important, the officials said, there is a fundamental distinction between Iraq in 2003 and Ukraine in 2022. "In Iraq, intelligence was used and deployed from this very podium to start a war," Mr. Sullivan said on Friday. "We are trying to stop a war."

The last time Russia moved against Ukraine, in 2014, intelligence officials blocked the Obama administration from sharing what they knew. But the Biden administration has studied those mistakes. The new disclosures reflect the influence of Avril D. Haines, the director of national intelligence, and William J. Burns, the C.I.A. director, who have shown a willingness to declassify information in an effort to disrupt Russian planning, administration officials said.

"We have learned a lot, especially since 2014, about how Russia uses the information space as part of its overall security and military apparatus," said Emily J. Horne, the spokeswoman for the National Security Council. "And we have learned a lot about how to deny them some impact in that space."

One U.S. intelligence official said that when the country's spy agencies have information that could help the world make better judgments about Russian activity, it should be released, as long as the government can avoid exposing how the information was collected or who passed it along.

It is, according to some strategists, a full-fledged information battle.

"I think it is great," said Beth Sanner, a former top intelligence official who regularly briefed President Donald J. Trump. "My guess is that these disclosures are freaking the Kremlin and the security services out. And, more important, it can narrow Putin's options and make him think twice."

The Ukrainian government has expressed unease with the American disclosures. President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Saturday that "too much information" about a possible Russian offensive was sowing unnecessary fear.

For all the disclosures, the Biden administration has provided no evidence of the disinformation plots they say they have uncovered. Intelligence officials have argued that sharing details would give Russia clues to how they work. That, in turn, would allow Moscow to "plug the leaks" and would amount to disarming in the middle of an information war, officials said.

Those concerns show how difficult it is for any democracy to go toe-to-toe with an autocratic state, like Russia. Unconstrained by truth, the Kremlin is simply better at such unconventional warfare.

"Remember, Vladimir Putin is a K.G.B. guy. He doesn't think like Biden does," said Daniel Hoffman, a former Moscow station chief for the C.I.A. "Putin comes from Mars and Biden's from Venus. Vladimir Putin is playing his own game and his chess games may be a little different than ours."

During many of his recent military forays, Mr. Putin has used disinformation to create doubt about what he is doing. Such tactics have slowed international responses and allowed Mr. Putin to more easily achieve his aims. When masked men began taking over government buildings in Crimea in February 2014, Moscow said they were part of a locally led pro-Russian uprising. Only after Crimea was taken over was it clear the "little green men" were Russian military forces.

Showing its ease with information warfare, Moscow responded quickly after Biden administration officials warned lawmakers this month about the enormous possible human costs if Mr. Putin launched a full invasion. "Madness and scaremongering continues," Russia's deputy ambassador to the United Nations, Dmitry Polyanskiy, wrote [last Saturday on Twitter](#). "What if we would say that US could seize London in a week and cause 300K civilian deaths? All this based on our intelligence sources that we won't disclose."

After Mr. Sullivan's remarks on Friday, [Russia's Foreign Ministry](#) accused the United States of conducting a "coordinated information attack" that it said was "aimed at undermining and discrediting Russia's fair demands for security guarantees, as well as at justifying Western geopolitical aspirations and military absorption of Ukraine's territory."

The Kremlin has been on a full propaganda push since last year, not just in Russia but also in the separatist regions of eastern Ukraine, and even in Kyiv, the capital. Moscow has accused Ukraine of plotting a genocide against ethnic Russians and denounced Ukrainians as Nazi sympathizers. Russian officials have also accused Ukraine and the United States of hatching secret plots to justify an intervention or invasion of separatist-controlled territory.

The United States began disclosing Russian maneuvering in early December when it [declassified intelligence assessments](#) that predicted Russia could eventually mass 175,000 troops for an invasion of Ukraine.

Russia struck back that month with its own allegations. In a claim repeated on social media and Moscow-aligned conspiracy sites, the Russian defense minister, Sergei K. Shoigu, said on Dec. 21 that some 120 military contractors from the United States had moved "an unidentified chemical component" into Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine ["to carry out provocations."](#)

While the U.S. allegations of the Russian troop buildup have been verified by commercial satellite imagery, there is no evidence for the Russian claims, which American officials have called completely false.

Even before the United States began disclosing Russian military plans and plots, Ms. Haines decided to share more intelligence with allies, leading to her visit to Brussels on Nov. 17. The Biden administration was determined not to see a repeat of 2014, when NATO was confused and caught by surprise when Russian forces took over Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula largely unopposed.

Senior Obama administration officials recalled their frustration when the intelligence agencies would not allow the White House to tell NATO, let alone the public, what Washington knew about Russia's moves.

"I can remember a dozen times when I thought our interests would be advanced if we just told the world what we knew," said Michael A. McFaul, who was the U.S. ambassador to Russia when it annexed Crimea.

Philip M. Breedlove, a retired four-star Air Force general who was NATO's supreme allied commander for Europe when Russia invaded Crimea and the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, [took matters into his own hands](#). "In the first two invasions of Ukraine — Crimea and Donbas — I used commercial available imagery to make the facts on the ground clear," he said in an interview this week.

An even more important lesson, according to former officials, was Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. election. Critics, including officials from the Obama administration, have said the United States was too passive in drawing attention to Russian influence operations.

The recent disclosures, said Jeh C. Johnson, a former homeland security secretary, are a way for the Biden administration to avoid old errors and make clear to Mr. Putin that America knows "what you are doing and we are putting your business out in the street and compromising your operations."

"This is payback for 2016," Mr. Johnson said.

The current information battle is playing out in a new era, where technology has allowed conspiracy theories to spread faster and wider than anytime before. At the same time, trust in government has further eroded. And that has meant many efforts to get ahead of Russian information operations are met with deep skepticism.

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| | <p>“If the U.S. government just comes out and says no, that’s wrong, some people will say, ‘Prove it, show me the videotape, show me the audio recording,’” said Glenn S. Gerstell, a former general counsel for the National Security Agency. “It’s an irreversible path once you start down that. And of course, the whole danger is that it risks disclosing sources and methods.”</p> <p>The danger of exposing those intelligence collection techniques is real. The Kremlin could lock down its communications right before a potential invasion.</p> <p>“This strategy is not risk free,” Ms. Sanner said. “If Russians are able to figure out the sources or they change how they communicate or just start locking down, it has the potential to partially blind us right at the very moment when we may need it.”</p> <p>Other strategists believe that the United States could be more aggressive. The United States or its allies could release information about Mr. Putin’s top lieutenants, for example, or the oligarchs who support him. That could sow doubt about people’s loyalty, or expose their wealth.</p> <p>“The new rules of war favor autocracies because they can do all these things well: They can fight sneaky and dirty,” said Sean McFate, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council who has written about the changing nature of war. “The question is what do we risk as a democracy by fighting this way? How does a democracy fight a secret war, if you will, without losing its democratic soul?”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Covid deaths spike in many states |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/12/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#covid-deaths-have-spiked-in-many-states-over-the-last-two-weeks-even-as-omicron-ebbs-nationally |
| GIST | <p>While governors across the country have been dropping mask mandates as coronavirus cases fall, deaths from Covid-19 in the United States remain stubbornly high. More than 2,500 deaths are still being reported on most days, according to data from The New York Times.</p> <p>Deaths have risen in 26 states, including South Carolina, Colorado and Kansas, in recent weeks. In Virginia, the daily average of deaths rose 260 percent in the last two weeks. Mississippi experienced an increase of 209 percent over the same 14 days. South Carolina’s increase also exceeded 200 percent.</p> <p>In Nevada, where 59 percent of the population is fully vaccinated, the daily average of deaths rose 37 percent in the last two weeks. Even so, Gov. Steve Sisolak cited a drop in hospitalizations and new cases on Thursday in announcing that the state would end its mask mandate, effective immediately.</p> <p>“I’m hopeful that we’ll continue the downward trend — that’s why we’re removing the mask mandate,” Mr. Sisolak said, while urging residents to get vaccinated and boosted.</p> <p>Governors and local leaders indicated that they were making public health decisions guided largely by rapidly decreasing case counts, which do not move in lock step with deaths. Instead, deaths lag the rate of infection because patients are often sick for weeks before dying. It can also take several days for those deaths to be reported.</p> <p>While fatalities are rising, the overall national picture reveals a country that is past the peak of cases from the highly infectious Omicron variant that took hold in December. New daily coronavirus cases in the United States have declined about 75 percent from their peak of more than 800,000 per day in mid-January.</p> <p>That peak was so high, however, that recent daily case counts averaging around 200,000 still exceed some previous surges.</p> |

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| | <p>About 100,000 people a day are hospitalized with the virus nationwide, a decrease of more than 30 percent in the last two weeks. The number of Covid-19 patients in intensive care units is also falling.</p> <p>West Virginia, Alabama and Kentucky — where vaccination rates are well below the national average — have the country’s highest recent per capita hospitalization rates.</p> <p>Though reported cases are decreasing in most states, some have experienced especially precipitous declines: Over the last two weeks, reports of new infections plummeted more than 70 percent in Connecticut, Indiana and Nebraska.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Next phase: learning to live with Covid |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/12/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#scientists-prepare-for-the-next-phase-of-learning-to-live-with-covid |
| GIST | <p>As the Omicron wave subsides in regions across the world, more governments, politicians and health officials are telling us that it’s time to start “living with the virus.”</p> <p>But what does that mean? And how do we do that?</p> <p>For guidance, The Times asked more than a dozen epidemiologists about the next phase of the pandemic and how they’re approaching it.</p> <p>Living with the virus “is an acknowledgment that eradication of SARS-CoV-2, like what we did with smallpox, is not feasible,” said Maria Sundaram, an infectious disease epidemiologist at the Marshfield Clinic Research Institute.</p> <p>Instead, we’ll need to rely on an arsenal of tools — including vaccines, paid sick leave and masks — to coexist with the virus while reducing our own risk and protecting others.</p> <p>Eventually, the thinking goes, we’ll get to a point where the coronavirus is incorporated into other common viruses we are used to dealing with all the time, said Pia MacDonald, an infectious disease epidemiologist at RTI International, a nonprofit research institute. “We should each reflect on how we live with other viruses that routinely circulate, such as influenza, respiratory syncytial virus, noroviruses and others.”</p> <p>That’s going to require a huge mental shift and acceptance of “a new element of manageable risk in our lives,” said Eduardo Franco, the director of the Division of Cancer Epidemiology at McGill University. “It means reacquiring behaviors, attitudes and social norms,” that have always been part of who we are.</p> <p>In practice, this readjustment will vary widely for different people depending on our personal health circumstances and the needs of those closest to us.</p> <p>“My family has moved away from restricting our activities as the Omicron surge has receded,” said Kate Eisenberg, an assistant professor of family medicine at the University of Rochester. “We do not have anyone with high-risk health conditions in the household, and we’re all vaccinated and boosted.”</p> <p>Ms. Eisenberg is currently planning some family trips, including air travel, and she is allowing her 12- and 15-year-old children to participate in most social activities. She has been avoiding indoor dining and crowded indoor settings, but as cases continue to come down, she plans to go out more.</p> <p>“I am taking my daughter to a Billie Eilish concert this weekend, which we’ve really been looking forward to,” she said. “We do still wear well-fitting masks, take home tests before getting together with friends and family, and assess the level of risk and local case levels before we go out.”</p> |

For Ms. MacDonald, the drop in cases has made her more comfortable entering other people's homes without a mask, and having her older parents over for visits.

"I will still wear a mask to the grocery store for the foreseeable future and opt for restaurants that have good ventilation and where tables are well spaced out," she said. "So long as cases are not surging locally, I will take advantage of mixing with my community at music, movie, theater and other venues, though will likely wear a mask out of habit."

For many Americans, however, any big adjustments are still on hold until young children can get vaccinated.

"Our children are both in child care, and we'll go into uncrowded shops, museums and libraries with masks on, though we don't do any indoor dining and haven't flown on a plane," said Julianne Meisner, a clinical assistant professor at the University of Washington School of Public Health.

But after her 1- and 3-year old are vaccinated, she said, "we're planning to resume indoor dining and take some trips to visit family and take some outdoorsy vacations. But we'll have our eye on what's going on and be ready to revisit plans if local transmission goes up or health care capacity begins to suffer."

After we've spent two years of living in fear of the virus, being asked to "live with" it now may seem daunting. But in many ways, we've been preparing for this moment since the outbreak and it can be easy to forget how far we've come.

"For the first year of the pandemic, I routinely received questions from friends, family, patients and acquaintances about how to think about risk in different situations before making decisions," Ms. Eisenberg said. "Now, hardly anyone asks those questions and most people have settled on their own conclusions about what works for them."

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Unvaccinated pregnant women w/Covid |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/12/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#new-studies-underscore-the-dangers-of-pregnancy-complications-for-unvaccinated-women-with-covid |
| GIST | <p>Two new reports lay out the added difficulties that unvaccinated women with Covid have during pregnancy and childbirth, adding to research showing that they face elevated risks.</p> <p>One study, published Thursday in the Archives of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine, suggests that the coronavirus can invade and destroy the placenta, through which the mother passes nutrients to the fetus.</p> <p>The other, published this week in the Journal of the American Medical Association, found that pregnant women infected with the coronavirus are about 40 percent as likely to develop serious complications or die during pregnancy than those who aren't infected.</p> <p>The study of the effects of the virus on the placenta found that infection may deprive the fetus of oxygen in unvaccinated pregnant women, leading to a higher risk of delivering stillborn babies. While other infections can cause stillbirth by passing through the placenta and damaging the fetus, Covid-19 takes a different, dangerous tack.</p> <p>"It causes extensive damage to the placenta, and stillbirth occurs from lack of oxygen," said Dr. David Schwartz, a perinatal pathologist in Atlanta and the lead author of the study. "The placental destruction is so severe that whether or not the fetus becomes infected might be irrelevant."</p> <p>Dr. Schwartz's research team analyzed 64 stillbirth cases and four neonatal deaths in 12 countries. All the pregnant mothers were unvaccinated, and all were thought to have been infected with the Delta variant. In the 68 cases, an average of 77 percent of the placenta had been destroyed.</p> |

Although stillbirths attributed to Covid-19 are uncommon — overall, about 24,000 babies are [stillborn](#) in the United States each year — a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [study released in November](#) found that pregnant women who had Covid-19 when they delivered their babies were almost twice as likely [to have a stillbirth](#) as healthy women who did not have Covid.

The new study about complications for mothers found that the severity of their Covid symptoms was the key factor in their heightened risk. The most severely ill women were three times more likely to develop pregnancy complications than those who tested negative or had milder symptoms.

The researchers analyzed electronic medical records of about 14,000 pregnant women between March 1 and Dec. 31, 2020, before vaccines were widely available. Of those, about 2,350 tested positive during pregnancy or within six weeks of delivery.

The study also pointed to increased danger for newborns: Covid-19 was significantly associated with premature birth and admission to newborn intensive care units.

“We know from other studies that vaccination prevents the most severe symptoms of the disease,” said Dr. Torri D. Metz, an associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology at University of Utah Health, who led the study. “So, this is just another piece of the puzzle that should encourage pregnant people to get vaccinated.”

The new studies add to research [showing the danger of Covid-19 to pregnant women and their babies](#). The C.D.C. has [strongly encouraged vaccination](#) for women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or planning to become pregnant. But vaccination rates are low among pregnant women, even though early research has found no evidence that the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna [vaccines](#) pose serious risks during [pregnancy](#).

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Study: rare virus lineages underreported |
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| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/12/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#rare-virus-lineages-were-predominant-in-nigeria-in-2021-a-new-study-shows-they-were-hardly-noticed |
| GIST | <p>A new study of underreported coronavirus variants is serving as a reminder that early detection and frequent genomic sequencing are among the most effective arrows in the quiver of public health officials.</p> <p>But that is precisely what is not happening in many countries, putting their own populations — as well as the rest of the world — at greater risk.</p> <p>Researchers in the United States and Nigeria examined a variant of interest, Eta, that circulated in Nigeria in early 2021, as well as a rare Delta sublineage in the region that was different from the Delta variant that circulated in the rest of the world.</p> <p>Eta may have warranted designation as a “variant of concern” had its growth potential been recognized earlier, wrote the researchers from Northwestern University’s Feinberg School of Medicine and the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. Their research was published this month in Nature Communications.</p> <p>“We were just lucky that this variant did not spread globally,” said Dr. Oyewale Tomori, a virologist who leads a Nigerian government committee on Covid-19.</p> <p>Judd Hultquist, a co-author of the report and the associate director of the Center for Pathogen Genomics and Microbial Evolution at Northwestern, said tracking of variants was “incredibly uneven” across the world.</p> <p>“Less than 1 percent of sequences are from the continent of Africa, and less than 3 percent are coming from South America,” he said in an interview.</p> |

On Thursday, the World Health Organization's Africa director, Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, encouraged wider use of genomic-sequencing technology in Africa to help speed up the detection of new variants. The technology is available only in a few of the region's middle-income countries, like South Africa and Botswana.

Researchers from around the world use [GISAID](#), the online global repository of coronavirus sequences, to share new genomes and scan for mutations in its hundreds of thousands of viral genetic sequences.

Nigeria, with a population of 220 million people, is the world's seventh most populous country and the largest Black-majority nation. It is also one of the least vaccinated: Less than 3 percent of its population is fully inoculated, according to the [Our World in Data](#) project at the University of Oxford.

The World Health Organization labeled Eta a variant of interest, meaning it was worth studying but not as dangerous as a variant of concern. But after Eta displaced the Alpha variant in Nigeria and the surrounding region early last year, the researchers found that it went largely unnoticed while Alpha remained the focus of much of the world.

"Eta had all the characteristics of a variant of concern, and it was able to outcompete the Alpha variant in the region before the arrival of Delta," Dr. Hultquist said.

And after Eta's rise and fall, a rare Delta sublineage (AY.36) appeared in the region that was different from the Delta variant that circulated in most of the world.

The study emphasizes the critical need to improve surveillance and monitoring coronavirus infections to ensure early detection of new variants in Nigeria and the West Africa region, said Dr. Moses Adewumi of the University of Ibadan, one of the collaborators.

Even now, the researchers said, there are only just over 1,400 coronavirus sequences from Nigeria available in public repositories. The United States, by comparison, is [sequencing](#) tens of thousands of specimens each week.

The variants that were scrutinized by researchers are no longer a threat. But at the time variants of Alpha and Eta produced the highest peak of new infections; and the rare Delta lineage caused the second peak, according to Dr. Ramon Lorenzo-Redondo of Northwestern, one of the study's authors. The peaks brought the highest death rates of the pandemic, he said.

Africa is not fully utilizing [available](#) lab resources, Dr. Tomori said. He said the continent's labs had [sequenced](#) 70,000 viral genomes by the end of 2021.

"There is inadequate sequencing going on in Africa, because many African governments have not appreciated the usefulness of such facilities in providing data for better control of epidemics," he said. "Also, there is a lack of collaboration among African researchers, some of whom prefer to work with their past 'colonial' colleagues."

One lesson is clear: It's never too early to try to tell what the impact of a variant might be. Researchers are already keeping a close eye on a new Omicron sub-variant, [BA.2](#).

Alex Sigal, a virologist at the Africa Health Research Institute in Durban, South Africa, who helped identify the Beta and Omicron variants, said: "The bigger message here is that we're not seeing everything, and that some of these places may not have control of Covid-19."

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Long Covid sufferers struggle exercising |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/12/well/move/long-covid-exercise.html |
| GIST | When Natalie Hollabaugh tested positive for Covid-19 in March 2020, her recovery felt extremely slow. Eighteen months later, she was still suffering from a litany of symptoms, including fatigue, shortness of |

breath, headaches and joint pain. She saw a cardiologist and a pulmonologist, who both ruled out other health problems, she said. And they advised her to start exercising, suggesting that some of her symptoms may have been a result of being out of shape. So Ms. Hollabaugh dutifully began using an exercise bike, speed walking on a treadmill and walking her dogs several miles a day.

But instead of helping, her new exercise regimen only exacerbated her symptoms. “I had never felt worse,” said Ms. Hollabaugh, 31, a lawyer who lives in Portland, Ore. She found she had to start taking daily naps, that her heart rate would skyrocket even when she was at rest and that she was so tired she couldn’t concentrate.

As one of the many Americans [suffering from long Covid](#), a condition characterized by new or lingering symptoms that can be felt for months after a coronavirus infection, Ms. Hollabaugh is not alone in experiencing setbacks with exercise. Natalie Lambert, a biostatistician and health data scientist at the Indiana University School of Medicine, has collected self-reported data from more than a million long Covid patients through a collaboration with Survivor Corps, a Facebook support group for Covid survivors. Patients frequently report that their doctors have advised them to exercise, she said — but many say that when they do, they feel worse afterward.

“The research that I’ve done has shown that inability to exercise is one of the most common long-term symptoms,” Dr. Lambert said. Some people are simply too tired to exercise, she said, while others experience debilitating symptom relapses like increases in fatigue, [brain fog](#) or muscle pain. This worsening of symptoms after engaging in even just a little bit of physical activity — what is sometimes called “post-exertional malaise” — seems to be common among long Covid patients. When researchers performed an online survey of 3,762 people with long Covid, as part of a [study published in August](#), they found that 89 percent reported post-exertional malaise.

These exercise-induced problems are not, however, merely the byproduct of becoming out of shape. The effects “are very, very different from normal and simple detraining,” said Dr. David Systrom, a pulmonary and critical care physician at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. They also don’t seem to be the result of lung or heart injury.

In [one small study](#) published in January, for example, Dr. Systrom and his colleagues compared 10 long Covid patients who had trouble exercising with 10 people who had never tested positive for Covid-19, but who had unexplained shortness of breath after exercise. The researchers found that nobody in the study had abnormal chest CT scans, anemia or problems with lung or heart function, suggesting that organ injury wasn’t to blame for their symptoms. Yet when the long Covid patients exercised on a stationary bicycle, Dr. Systrom found that some veins and arteries were not working properly, preventing oxygen from being delivered efficiently to their muscles.

Nobody knows why these blood vessel problems occur, Dr. Systrom said, but [another one of his recent studies](#) suggested that long Covid patients experience damage to a certain kind of nerve fiber involved in how organs and blood vessel function.

Other research on exercise intolerance implicates problems with how the heart rate responds to exercise. In [one study published in November](#), researchers from Indiana studied 29 women who had tested positive for Covid-19 about three months earlier. When these women underwent a six-minute-long walking test, their heart rates didn’t accelerate as much — or recover as quickly — as the heart rates of 16 similar women who had not been infected with Covid-19.

“Clearly, there’s something going on that’s interfering with that normal response,” said Stephen J. Carter, an author of the study and an exercise physiologist at the Indiana University Bloomington School of Public Health.

Dr. Lambert pointed out that some patients with long Covid [are also diagnosed with](#) postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (or POTS), a disorder that affects blood flow. In people who have POTS, “the nervous system can’t regulate the things that it’s supposed to automatically control, like heart rate, blood

pressure, sweating and body temperature,” she said. Yet “those are all things that when you’re exercising need to be regulated properly.”

Some doctors also point to parallels between patients with long Covid and those with chronic fatigue syndrome, who have severe fatigue, memory and cognitive problems, and often muscle or joint pain. For decades, physicians advised chronic fatigue patients that exercise would improve their symptoms, but for many patients, [exercise actually made their symptoms worse](#) and now is [no longer recommended](#).

In 2021, Dr. Systrom and his team studied [160 chronic fatigue patients](#), and found that when they exercised, they experienced many of the same blood vessel problems observed in long Covid patients, while control subjects did not. “We’re essentially finding the exact same thing” when it comes to potential mechanisms, he said.

This all leads to one question: Should Covid patients who are having trouble with exercise continue to ramp up their physical activity? Nobody knows — and opinions differ. “There are both patients and doctors who are vehemently against any exercise” because of these issues, Dr. Systrom said. But he also said that exercise can be possible, and even beneficial, after long Covid patients receive proper treatment. “If you can get the patient in a better place with medications, then you can embark on a graded exercise program without precipitating crashes,” he said.

Dr. Lambert agreed. “You can’t just jump into exercise, or you’re going to be set back,” she said, but you should “slowly try to reincorporate it if you are feeling better.” She added that long Covid can manifest in different ways, so doctors and patients may need to tailor their recommendations to patients’ needs.

“That’s really the story of Covid — that for every patient, long Covid is different,” she said. “There’s probably never going to be a one-size-fits-all recommendation for exercise.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 US: Russia invasion Ukraine at any time |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/11/world/europe/ukraine-russia-diplomacy.html |
| GIST | <p>WASHINGTON — The United States warned on Friday that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia could mount a major military assault on Ukraine at any moment, suggesting a crisis that had been building for months has reached a critical phase.</p> <p>The Pentagon, which has ruled out deploying troops to defend Ukraine, sent 3,000 soldiers to neighboring Poland on Friday as tensions mounted, reinforcing the U.S. military personnel being dispatched to help NATO allies. A host of countries, fearing an imminent invasion, told their citizens to leave Ukraine. And President Biden spent more than an hour on a call with allies to discuss “diplomacy and deterrence,” the White House said.</p> <p>Ukraine warned that drills by Russia and Russian-backed separatists had left the country all but encircled and its ports effectively blockaded, the latest evidence of a shift in tone after weeks in which Ukraine’s leaders had downplayed the threat of an attack.</p> <p>With the United States pushing for a diplomatic solution, Mr. Putin and Mr. Biden will speak by phone on Saturday, according to the Kremlin and a White House spokesman, and the Kremlin said Mr. Putin would also speak again with President Emmanuel Macron of France.</p> <p>U.S. intelligence officials had initially thought Mr. Putin would wait until the end of the Winter Olympics in Beijing later this month before deciding whether to go ahead with an offensive, to avoid antagonizing President Xi Jinping of China, a critical ally. In recent days, however, new intelligence and further Russian troop deployments prompted a change in their assessment. American officials said it was still unclear whether Mr. Putin had made a decision to invade.</p> <p>U.S. officials have picked up intelligence that Russia is considering Wednesday as the possible date for the start of military action, according to multiple officials briefed on the material. Those officials, who spoke</p> |

on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive information, acknowledged the possibility that the mention of a particular date could be part of a Russian disinformation effort.

The combination of the Russian troop movements and the new intelligence prompted a cascade of public warnings by the United States and other countries — including the Netherlands, Latvia, Britain, Japan and even Russia — to any citizens remaining in Ukraine. Many others began evacuating embassy staff.

“The Russians are in a position to be able to mount a major military action in Ukraine any day now,” Jake Sullivan, Mr. Biden’s national security adviser, told reporters at the White House on Friday, adding that an invasion could begin during the Olympics, which are scheduled to end on Feb. 20.

“We don’t know exactly what is going to happen,” Mr. Sullivan said, emphasizing the need for Americans to leave Ukraine now. “The risk is now high enough and the threat is now immediate enough that this is what prudence demands. If you stay, you are assuming risk with no guarantee that there will be any other opportunity to leave and no prospect of a U.S. military evacuation in the event of a Russian invasion.”

Russia has made a series of demands of the West, including scaling back the NATO military presence in Eastern Europe to 1990s levels and guaranteeing that Ukraine could never join NATO. (Mr. Putin has long been vehemently opposed to Ukraine, a former pillar of the Soviet Union, joining NATO, a position he last made forcefully clear when Russian forces reclaimed Crimea in 2014.) The United States has called those demands “non-starters” and instead offered a series of proposals aimed at arms control.

“What I do know about Putin is he likes uncertainty,” said Michael A. McFaul, a former U.S. ambassador to Russia. “He has leveraged that in the past for advantage. He is forcing Biden’s hand and everybody else’s.”

Next week, the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, is scheduled to visit Ukraine’s capital, Kyiv and Moscow, fresh from a visit to Washington where he and Mr. Biden promised a “united” front on shutting down Nord Stream 2, a lucrative Germany-to-Russia gas pipeline project, should Russia invade Ukraine.

Russia’s foreign ministry dismissed American talk of war as mere propaganda.

“A coordinated information attack is being conducted against Moscow,” the ministry said in a statement, along with a list of previous Western warnings of a possible imminent invasion. That messaging, it said, is “aimed at undermining and discrediting Russia’s fair demands for security guarantees, as well as at justifying Western geopolitical aspirations and military absorption of Ukraine’s territory.”

Maria Zakharova, the ministry spokeswoman, wrote on the Telegram app: “The White House’s hysteria is as revealing as ever. The Anglo-Saxons need war. At any price.”

Mr. Sullivan disagreed with the idea that informing Americans of Russia’s military capabilities was the same as calling for a war. “We are trying to stop a war. Prevent war. To avert a war,” he told reporters.

American officials have warned of a grim toll if Mr. Putin proceeds with a military invasion of Ukraine, including the potential deaths of 25,000 to 50,000 civilians, 5,000 to 25,000 members of the Ukrainian military and 3,000 to 10,000 members of the Russian military. Mr. Sullivan said on Friday that officials believed that an attack would likely start with missile and aerial attacks, and continue with a ground invasion.

On Friday, Mr. Biden spoke with other trans-Atlantic leaders on a call that included Mr. Scholz; Prime Ministers Boris Johnson of Britain, Mario Draghi of Italy and Justin Trudeau of Canada; and Presidents Macron, Andrzej Duda of Poland, Klaus Iohannis of Romania, Ursula von der Leyen of the European Commission and Charles Michel of the European Council; and the NATO secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg.

The leaders met for about 80 minutes, in a call that was initially supposed to be centered around “diplomacy and deterrence,” the White House said.

Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also spoke on Friday with his Russian counterpart as well as allied chiefs of defense about the crisis in Ukraine, military officials said.

The calls came as Russia builds up its forces in Belarus, western Russia and Crimea. Ukraine said on Friday that Russian-backed separatists were holding military exercises in the slice of eastern Ukraine they controlled, at the same time that Russia holds exercises near Ukraine.

The drills tested the separatists’ preparation for live-fire operations, practicing “driving artillery, tanks and armored vehicles” in field exercises, the Ukrainian statement said. Some units of the force, believed to number 30,000 troops, were put on their highest level of alert, the Ukrainians said, and senior Russian military officers were observing the activity.

The assessment from Kyiv was the latest evidence of a shift by officials there to more alarming commentary about the military risk facing the country. That follows weeks of efforts to minimize the threat of an invasion, seeking to calm the public, limit the economic fallout and avoid anything that could be deemed a provocation by Moscow.

“If there’s a war tomorrow, Putin has calculated that Zelensky will be blamed for not preparing for war,” Mr. McFaul said, referencing President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine. “That doesn’t get a lot of attention in our press, but that’s a very big part of his strategy. Ideally, he would like to see democracy in Ukraine fall, and Zelensky personally fall.”

Ukraine this week began its own nationwide military exercises to coincide with joint Russian and Belarusian exercises to the north of Ukraine, in Belarus, only 140 miles from Kyiv.

Those joint exercises involved a flurry of military activity on Friday, the Russian Ministry of Defense said in a statement. Troops practiced evacuating the wounded from the battlefield, maneuvering with armored vehicles and reconnaissance activities. Russia’s Air Force jets fired at an airborne target.

To the south, the Russian Navy announced on Thursday the closure of large swaths of the Black Sea for live-fire exercises by its fleet that will effectively blockade Ukrainian ports, including the port of Odessa. The naval exercises were scheduled to begin Sunday and last six days.

Russia has massed armored vehicles and soldiers near its borders to the northeast of Ukraine and in the south on the Crimean Peninsula, as well as in Belarus.

A meeting in Moscow on Friday between the British defense secretary, Ben Wallace, and his Russian counterpart, Sergei K. Shoigu, was cordial but led to a dim assessment of relations between Russia and the West by Mr. Shoigu.

After Mr. Wallace laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow, acknowledging Russia’s losses in World War II, Mr. Shoigu nodded to the countries’ alliance in that war but added, “Unfortunately, the level of our cooperation is close to zero and is about to cross the zero meridian and reach the negatives.”

In news conferences that extended into early Friday morning in Berlin, both Russian and Ukrainian negotiators said a channel of talks supported by Mr. Macron of France had brought no breakthroughs.

“It would be good if during the second meeting we could agree on something,” Andriy Yermak, Ukraine’s chief negotiator, said. After nine hours of talks, the negotiators could not agree on a joint statement.

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| | Separate talks in Moscow on Thursday between the British foreign secretary, Liz Truss, and Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, also went nowhere, with Mr. Lavrov comparing them to "the conversation of a mute person with a deaf person." |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Polarizing figure in Russia doping scandal |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/kamila-valieva-eteri-tutberidze-doping-figure-skating-11644669602?mod=hp_featst_pos3 |
| GIST | <p>BEIJING—The teenager who clinched a gold medal for the Russian Olympic Committee's figure skating team, only to be ensnared days later by doping allegations, is better known in her sport for another distinction: She's an Eteri girl.</p> <p>The drama of another doping scandal that once again pits Russia against international sports organizations has cast a harsh spotlight on Eteri Tutberidze, the head of Kamila Valieva's coaching team and one of skating's most polarizing figures.</p> <p>She is now part of an Olympics drama that has cast a pall over the Winter Games and threatens at least one Russian gold medal.</p> <p>Tutberidze's young students have revolutionized the sport in recent years with an arsenal of spectacularly athletic jumps that put them leaps and bounds above the rest of the world. But their phenomenal success and short careers have underscored the cutthroat nature of Russian women's skating and the steady clip of a conveyor belt that has produced champion after champion, making them seem almost interchangeable.</p> <p>Russian training strategies have also raised concerns about the welfare of underage athletes in the most-adored event of the Olympics. The issue will linger even after Valieva's legal situation is resolved. Tutberidze is the coach of the two other ROC female skaters in the women's event, 17-year-olds Anna Shcherbakova and Alexandra Trusova, and they could easily take gold and silver in her absence.</p> <p>The Russian Anti-Doping Agency said Friday that it was launching an investigation of Valieva's team "to identify all the circumstances of the possible anti-doping rules violation." The agency didn't name Tutberidze and there has been no suggestion of wrongdoing on her part. The IOC said it would welcome an investigation into the entourage of an athlete.</p> <p>Olga Ermolina, a spokeswoman for the Figure Skating Federation of Russia, characterized Tutberidze as a talented coach and dismissed criticism of her methods, saying that if the complaints were accurate, "then Tutberidze wouldn't have a line of people who want to train with her."</p> <p>"Any leader, even yours, must be tough at times, because people by nature don't always want to work and give 100% every day," Ermolina said. "And her fanatical dedication is paying off."</p> <p>Instantly recognizable for her steely rinkside demeanor and striking curly blond hair, Tutberidze is known in Russia as the "Snow Queen" and has provoked extreme reactions for years.</p> <p>To some, she's a genius. To others, she's a tyrant. They say the woman named the best coach in figure skating by the International Skating Union in 2020 has transformed the sport—or destroyed it.</p> <p>Until this week, those reactions were often split down old East-West lines, with Tutberidze equally comfortable embracing the adulation of Russia and being seen as the cartoonish villain in the United States.</p> <p>But her status at home, where she already had some detractors, appeared to slip with the ROC team medal and Valieva's eligibility for the singles competition at stake. The Twitter hashtag #позорТутберидзе, or #shameonTutberidze began trending in Russia on Friday, after international sports officials confirmed that Valieva tested positive for a banned substance weeks before the Olympics.</p> |

The Court of Arbitration for Sport is due to decide by Monday on whether Valieva would be allowed to compete in the women's figure skating singles event in Beijing.

After practice on Saturday—where Valieva, her fate still in limbo, gave Tutberidze a long hug—the coach said she is sure her skater is innocent.

“For us this is not a theorem but an axiom—there is no need to prove it,” Tutberidze told Russian television. “Either this is a fatal coincidence, or a well prearranged plan. We really hope that justice will prevail.”

“We are with our athletes in trouble and in joy, to the end,” she added.

Ermolina said that Tutberidze and other federation officials weren't available for further comment during the Olympics.

Tutberidze has made her coaching philosophy clear: Like the Russian skating federation, she believes the price of training is worth the glory of victory.

“I feel infinitely offended if I understand that an athlete could have done this training much better,” Tutberidze said in a December interview with Russian state television. “If I don't force them, this athlete will not have a medal and the joy of standing on the podium and hearing the anthem in their honor.”

Other skating coaches have been accused of abusive methods, including in the U.S. and Japan, but they're typically less brash about their approach. They also haven't had the same success: over the last eight years, Tutberidze's students have dominated the senior and junior levels, snagging two Olympic gold medals and a silver before Beijing.

“Tutberidze keeps her little girls under tremendous pressure,” coach Alexander Volkov told Russian state newswire RIA Novosti in 2019. “They do whatever she says. If she tells them to do a quintuple jump, they will go. They will break, but they will go. She squeezes out of them everything she can squeeze out.”

The crowded roster of talented female Russian skaters chasing a handful of opportunities has raised the bar for the rest of the world and knocked other nations out of medal contention. It has also created an unprecedented turnover of champions and left some of Russia's most successful skaters with significant physical and mental injuries.

And it has made the Russians the sport's most dominant force. In the last three skating seasons, 11 different Russian women have won around 80% of the medals across the major international competitions. At four of the events, they were the only skaters on the podium.

The Russian federation essentially thrives on what Romanian-American gymnastics coach Bela Karolyi used to call “scorpions in a bottle,” a vivid depiction of survival of the fittest in which only one creature emerges alive.

When picking a team for a major international competition, they can usually choose from some 10 age-eligible skaters who could medal. And had Valieva's result emerged sooner, she would have been easily replaceable: ROC's first alternate happens to be the reigning world silver medalist.

As in gymnastics, figure skating has come to elevate prepubescent athletes racing to acquire skills while their bodies are at their freshest and lightest, hoping to beat the clock of injury or exhaustion just in time for a once-every-four-years shot at Olympic glory.

That also ensures rapid turnover at the top. Russia has cycled through a half-dozen leading women in the four years since two of Tutberidze's prized students, then-18-year-old Evgenia Medvedeva and 15-year-old Alina Zagitova, battled on the Pyeongchang ice with the rest of the field competing for bronze.

Zagitova, who won gold, hasn't competed since December 2019. Medvedeva, who took silver, last skated in competition in September 2020.

Neither could keep up with the latest wave of Tutberidze's pupils as they let loose their new collection of triple axels and quadruple jumps.

"This is sport. Today we have five girls," Evgeni Plushenko, the four-time Olympic medalist who coaches many of the Russian contenders outside Tutberidze's purview, said before the last Olympics. "Maybe one month later, we have one girl."

That one girl is now Kamila Valieva.

From the time she was 3 years old, Valieva dreamed of being the Olympic champion, she has said. She dabbled in ballet and gymnastics, but when her mother decided it was time to specialize, Valieva chose figure skating. She left her hometown of Kazan for Moscow to train.

By the time she arrived in Beijing and became the first woman to land a quadruple jump at the Olympics, Valieva was a star back home, where she has been featured in the Russian edition of Vogue magazine. When Valieva skated in the team event last week, actor Alec Baldwin praised her on social media hours before her positive test was reported.

"A song. A poem. A painting. To have dedicated one's life...to this artistry," Baldwin wrote on Instagram. "Thank you, Kamila Valieva, for your gift of heart-stopping beauty to the world."

He wasn't her only spellbound fan. In her first season working with Tutberidze, Valieva perfected a short program based on the Pablo Picasso oil painting "Girl on a Ball," which depicts a group of traveling circus performers during a rehearsal. Picasso's granddaughter invited her to visit the artist's museum in Paris after watching her performance.

But the question about the Russian formula that delivered Valieva is the cost.

Zagitova, the Pyeongchang gold medalist, has said that she restricted her own food intake and wouldn't even let herself drink water at those Games.

"We just rinsed our mouths and spit it out," she said in 2019.

Medvedeva has said she retired because she could no longer turn her back in the direction she needed to jump. Shcherbakova skated through pneumonia at the Russian championships in late 2020. Trusova sustained a stress fracture in October, competed anyway, then found herself sidelined for weeks as she tried to claw her way back to the Olympic team.

She was aided when one of Tutberidze's other students sustained a broken arm in training and yet another of her skaters appeared to be felled by a fractured hip; it was later described as an upper leg injury.

Tutberidze primarily works with young female skaters. One exception is Vladimir Samoilov, who began experiencing back problems and skated with enormous pain, he told Russian sports site Sport24.ru in December. Tutberidze didn't like that.

"She said: 'Either you are training, or if your back hurts, stay at home and don't come again,'" Samoilov said. He came to train—and injured himself.

Tutberidze's supporters say she takes great care of everyone under her tutelage, occasionally supports her athletes financially and makes herself available to help them on and off the ice.

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| | <p>“It is as if she lives with you through all the experiences and worries,” Adeliia Petrosian, one of her 14-year-old students, told sports channel Matchtv.ru in January. “Her sense of humor is gorgeous. She has very funny jokes and is absolutely not offensive. Even the parents laugh.”</p> <p>Petrosian, who is on the verge of eligibility for senior competition, is currently doing quadruple jumps that are even more difficult than Valieva’s. She credits Tutberidze’s psychological approach for her success.</p> <p>“She takes your hands and on ‘three’ we exhale together,” Petrosian said. “As if at first you inhale all your worries, and then sharply blow them out of yourself. And with a cold head you go out to skate.”</p> <p>Tutberidze has said that she believes in transparency. Others can flatter her skaters, she says. She prefers the truth.</p> <p>“The truth, as it is, they will hear only from me,” Tutberidze said in December. “If our athletes are good, they will be welcome everywhere. If they are bad, then no one needs them.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Students forgot how to talk to each other |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/college-students-forgot-how-to-talk-to-each-other-11644627316?mod=hp_lead_pos11 |
| GIST | <p>When students at San Jose State University returned to campus last fall after more than a year of remote learning, lecturer Damon Moon thought they would be chatty and excited to see one another. Instead, he noticed something concerning: They weren’t talking at all.</p> <p>Before class, students were looking at their phones or laptops. Even in the campus cafeteria, Mr. Moon saw that most students were eating alone, sandwich in one hand, phone in the other.</p> <p>“They lost the skill to have small talk,” said Mr. Moon, who teaches international business classes. To get a close-up look at this phenomenon, I spoke to Mr. Moon and his students at the university.</p> <p>“When I was in elementary school or middle school, if I wanted to talk to someone new, I would go up to them and try to strike up a conversation,” said Kian Kashefi, a 19-year-old business accounting major. Now, he said, “it feels weird to talk to anybody new without first connecting on social media.”</p> <p>In a prolonged pandemic that has shifted more interactions online, college students are finding it harder to strike up conversations and make friends. In the past, socializing wasn’t just a perk but also a big incentive for students choosing campus life.</p> <p>College instructors worry that if they don’t do something to facilitate conversation in class, their students will be unprepared to enter the workforce. To overcome screen-reinforced social awkwardness, some even lean on smartphones and web browsers to encourage students to interact.</p> <p>Researchers from three universities surveyed nearly 33,000 college students around the U.S. and found two-thirds were struggling with loneliness in the fall of 2020. More than a year later, many students, including those at San Jose State, had returned to remote instruction after winter break because of the Omicron Covid-19 surge.</p> <p>Joel Figueroa, a 20-year-old business major, said that since the pandemic began he has become more nervous about talking to people. “I was much more confident in my abilities before,” he said.</p> <p>While technology has enabled him to remain in touch with friends, it has undermined his in-person interactions, he said. “My connections with friends offline would definitely be deeper if we were not so attached to our devices,” he said.</p> |

Even older students I talked to, who didn't grow up with as much technology or spend formative years in a pandemic, are finding it hard to make connections.

"I didn't form relationships with any students when I went back to campus last fall," said Megan Dela Rosa, a 43-year-old business major. "Everyone had their masks on and you didn't know anyone's comfort level." She added, "I just went to class, got my work done and left."

Anna Touneh transferred to San Jose State from a community college last fall. Since school began this year online, the 32-year-old said talking to students has only become more awkward.

In one class recently, small groups of students went to Zoom breakout rooms to work on an assignment. Ms. Touneh said in her group, no one had their cameras on and no one spoke. "It took me six minutes to say something," she said. "I finally gathered the courage, but it was very meek. I said, 'Hey, guys, so what are we supposed to be doing?'"

Runhua Yang, a 43-year-old business major, said she's normally extroverted but the pandemic has made it more difficult to express herself. Masks have made it harder for teachers to hear her, she said, causing her to speak up less often. "If a professor doesn't encourage participation, I stay quiet," she said.

Parents and psychologists were already concerned that phone usage was negatively affecting social-skill development among young people, even before the pandemic, according to Danielle Ramo, chief clinical officer at BeMe Health, a mobile platform for teen mental health. In a previous job, she helped develop [an app called Nod](#) to help college students improve their social lives by challenging them to do things like smile at five new people or keep their dorm-room doors open in the evening.

Mr. Moon co-created a [web app called AskClass](#) that has two different games geared to getting students to pay attention and learn something about each other. In the first, a randomly selected student answers rapid-fire questions like "Halloween or Christmas?" and "Walking or running?" The app then selects another student at random to repeat the answers given by the first student. A second game replaces questions with true-or-false statements about the student's personality, such as "I am usually patient toward others."

He began using the software in Zoom classes last spring and found it worked well when students returned to campus last fall. At the beginning of each class, he plays music and displays the app on a screen.

Mr. Moon said his free app is now in use by teachers at 30 other colleges and universities.

"Schools were an environment that encouraged students to have reasonable conversations and build relationships during their formative years," Mr. Moon said. "I believe the decisions that the schools make in creating those environments post-pandemic will determine the type of society our kids will be living in 30 years from now."

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 US aims to thwart Atlantic base for China |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-aims-to-thwart-chinas-plan-for-atlantic-base-in-africa-11644607931?mod=hp_listb_pos1 |
| GIST | <p>NAIROBI—The Biden administration is intensifying its campaign to persuade Equatorial Guinea to reject China's bid to build a military base on the country's Atlantic Coast.</p> <p>A delegation of senior U.S. diplomatic and military personnel plans to visit the small Central African nation next week, according to government officials, and is expected to discuss American counter-piracy assistance and other inducements intended to convince Equatorial Guinean President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo to spurn Beijing's advances.</p> <p>The delegation will be led by the State Department's top Africa official, Molly Phee, and Maj. Gen. Kenneth Ekman of the military's Africa Command.</p> |

The visit coincides with rising American concern about China's global expansionism and its pursuit of a permanent military presence on waters the U.S. considers home turf.

"We'd really, really not like to see a Chinese facility" on the Atlantic, said Tibor Nagy, Ms. Phee's predecessor as assistant secretary of state for African affairs.

The Wall Street Journal reported last year that classified U.S. intelligence reports suggest China intends to build its first Atlantic base in Equatorial Guinea, likely in the city of Bata. Bata already has a Chinese-built commercial port with water deep enough to dock naval vessels.

The head of U.S. Africa Command, Gen. Stephen Townsend, later repeated the reports' findings, telling Voice of America in January that Beijing is "intent on building a military air base and/or naval facility in Equatorial Guinea."

A Chinese Embassy spokesperson in Washington didn't comment directly on Beijing's aspirations on Africa's west coast, but added that "China is committed to a defensive national defense policy and is always a builder of world peace."

Chinese state-owned companies are building ports and other [infrastructure all across Africa](#), from highways in Kenya to hospitals in Equatorial Guinea's hinterlands. A military base in Bata would fit the Chinese model of integrating commercial and political ends, China experts say, because it would both give China's military a place to refit and rearm warships in the Atlantic and give Chinese companies access to the interior of Central Africa via Equatorial Guinea's excellent highways.

The U.S. is hoping to quash any deal before it is signed, and Equatorial Guinea's leaders appear aware of the potential leverage they now hold.

In December, the president's son and heir apparent, Vice President Teodoro "Teodorin" Nguema Obiang Mangue, tweeted: "China is the model of a friendly nation and strategic partner, but, for now, there is no agreement."

In October last year, a senior White House official visited Mr. Obiang and his son in Malabo—the capital city, situated on the island of Bioko—to raise U.S. objections to China's basing plans.

"We're not asking [Equatorial Guinea] to choose between China and us," Gen. Townsend told VOA. "What we're asking them to do is consider their other international partners and their concerns, because a Chinese military base in Equatorial Guinea is of great concern to the U.S. and all of their other partners."

Equatorial Guinea was Spain's only colony in sub-Saharan Africa. Since its independence in 1968, the country has been ruled by members of a single family.

Mr. Obiang came to power in 1979, after overthrowing his infamously brutal uncle, Francisco Macias.

Successive U.S. administrations have condemned Mr. Obiang for his regime's alleged corruption, human-rights abuses and dictatorial rule.

In a 2014 civil settlement, the Justice Department took possession of a mansion, a Ferrari and Michael Jackson memorabilia worth tens of millions of dollars, assets the government alleged that the president's son Mr. Obiang Mangue acquired corruptly.

At the time, Mr. Obiang Mangue denied having gotten rich by raiding state coffers.

Oil minister Gabriel Mbagha Obiang Lima, another of the president's children and often the regime's public face, didn't respond to requests for comment on the allegations against his family and U.S. concerns about Chinese military overtures.

U.S. concerns about corruption and human-rights violations limit the tools the Biden administration has at its disposal in negotiating with the Obiangs, according to U.S. diplomats.

But American officials believe they might make headway by helping Equatorial Guinea secure the pirate-infested waters of the Gulf of Guinea.

The country is split between a mainland section bordering Cameroon and Gabon and a set of islands in the Gulf of Guinea. Those waters generate the bulk of the country's income, in the form of revenues from offshore oil and gas deposits developed by American energy companies.

In recent years, the Gulf of Guinea has seen a surge in piracy, threatening both the oil industry and sea traffic in Equatorial Guinea's waters. Over the past two years, there have been 54 incidents in which pirates have succeeded in boarding commercial or private vessels, as well as four more that ended in gunfire, according to Gulf of Guinea-wide data collected by the British and French navies.

On Jan. 29, armed attackers in a speed boat approached a passenger boat between Bata and Malabo, prompting a firefight between the pirates and the boat's security team.

"That has now become the most dangerous waterway in the world as far as piracy is concerned," said Mr. Nagy.

U.S. officials are linking maritime-security assistance to their effort to woo Equatorial Guinea away from the Chinese.

Gen. Townsend told reporters this month that the U.S. supports creation of an international task force to combat piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, akin to an effort that has apparently succeeded in eliminating such crimes on the other side of the continent, off the Horn of Africa.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Winter Olympics sadder, quieter, & scarier |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/forget-faster-and-stronger-the-winter-olympics-are-sadder-quieter-scarier-11644589658?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos4 |
| GIST | <p>BEIJING—On the day Team USA flag bearer Elana Meyers Taylor was supposed to march her country into the Olympic Stadium, she was in a Chinese isolation hotel. She had tested positive for Covid-19 and watched the Opening Ceremony on TV in a room she wasn't allowed to leave.</p> <p>Ms. Meyers Taylor was one of the lucky ones. She has since recovered and is scheduled to compete as one of the medal favorites in two bobsled events.</p> <p>In the gloom of the Beijing Winter Olympics, luck is a relative term. The Games are supposed to be an ebullient, global sporting bonanza, but they have never felt so downbeat. Rather than "Faster, Higher, Stronger—Together," the Olympic motto, the Beijing Games so far have been sadder and quieter.</p> <p>Olympians compete in nearly empty arenas without friends or family. Some wear N95 masks, in practice and even in competition, to limit the risk of infection. The rest live with the daily fear of testing positive, being sent to isolation and watching years of training slip away.</p> <p>Natalia Maliszewska, a short-track speedskater from Poland, was awoken at 3 a.m. one night this week, before she was set to compete, and transported to isolation before learning that authorities had made a mistake. It later turned out that she had tested positive and was returned to isolation.</p> <p>"To me, this is a big joke," Ms. Maliszewska said. "I hope whoever is managing this has a lot of fun. My heart and my mind can't take this anymore."</p> |

The usual stresses, strains and tolls of competing at the Games have been amplified by a pandemic that has shrunk the event to fit into a suffocating bubble.

American figure skater Vincent Zhou felt a sense of desperation from inside his isolation hotel room this week after he tested positive for Covid-19. With his chance to compete now over—he skated in the team event but missed his individual event—he was awaiting the two negative PCR tests that would return his freedom.

“I’ve taken all the precautions I can,” he said in a tearful Instagram video. “I’ve isolated myself so much that the loneliness I’ve felt in the last month or two has been crushing at times.”

There have been troubles rumbling beneath every Olympics for the past decade. Sochi had terrorism fears. Rio had the Zika virus. Pyeongchang had nuclear posturing. Tokyo also had Covid-19. Yet the combination of disease control and geopolitical tension has cast one of the longest shadows over the Beijing Games.

Two years after the first lockdown in Wuhan signaled the beginning of a global pandemic, more than 70,000 people moved into what China’s Olympics organizers call a “closed loop.” Athletes, coaches, media and volunteers are tested daily by staff covered head-to-toe in hazmat suits and sequestered from the rest of a nation adhering to a strict zero-Covid policy.

Olympians peer out the windows of buses at Beijing residents going about their daily lives. Reporters are prohibited from crossing the street from the hockey rink to the curling site because the road in between isn’t within the closed loop. After the Omicron variant triggered a harder clampdown, no fans were permitted to buy tickets, giving the whole Olympics enterprise the feel of a biosecure soundstage.

To the hosts, the taming of the virus counts as a showcase of Chinese muscle, set against the backdrop of a pandemic as well as international concerns over China’s treatment of ethnic minority Muslims, alleged cyberspying and limits on freedom of expression, all of which China has denied.

Sour relations between the U.S. and China resulted in an American diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Games. Team USA’s athletes were advised to pack disposable phones instead of personal phones in case of hacking. Human-rights advocates warned Olympians against protesting while on Chinese soil.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping was joined at the Games by Russian President Vladimir Putin. They issued a joint statement criticizing the U.S. as Russian troops massed on the border with Ukraine.

“I appeal to all political authorities across the world,” International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said during the Opening Ceremony. “Give peace a chance.”

The primary concern for local authorities is the integrity of the bubble separating the Olympics from the rest of Beijing. Nearly 500,000 tests since the Opening Ceremony identified 37 cases but found no signs of the coronavirus spreading among the masked, almost entirely vaccinated residents of the closed loop.

‘I cry every day’

Athletes whose dreams were shattered by catching the virus days before their scheduled flights thought they were the most miserable Olympians. There turned out to be a worse scenario: testing negative at home and then testing positive in China.

In the first week of the Beijing Games, dozens of athletes and coaches had their Olympic experience transform into a lonely stay at an isolation hotel. As of Friday, 26 athletes were in isolation, according to the IOC, and another 66 had been discharged.

While the number of positive Covid tests a day remains minuscule, the measures haven’t prevented the coronavirus from ripping through entire squads and upending events, including the women’s hockey tournament this week.

The Russian Olympic Committee team squared off against Canada. Both teams wore masks for two periods, but the Russians removed theirs in the third. At least one of the Russians later tested positive.

Entire events are being reshaped by who may or may not be free to compete. The Nordic combined event is missing both the reigning Olympic champion and the athlete ranked No. 1 in the world. Instead of ski jumping off the side of mountains and gliding through cross-country courses, they were kept in their living quarters, stuck with unreliable Wi-Fi connections, bland food and without training equipment.

Russian biathlete Valeria Vasnetsova posted photos from isolation that showed a meal made up of a small portion of pasta, overcooked meat and a few potatoes. "My stomach hurts, I'm very pale and I have huge black circles around my eyes," she wrote on Instagram. "I want all this to end. I cry every day. I'm very tired."

The IOC upgraded the quality of the isolation experience in response to complaints from the trapped Olympians, but only after encountering another problem: When it scheduled a call to discuss the conditions with the Athletes' Commission, the chair of the committee was in isolation herself.

Strange journey

To secure the negative Covid-19 results he needed to enter Beijing, American speedskater Casey Dawson said he took 45 PCR tests over the past three weeks. He didn't get his first negative result until Feb. 4, the day of the Opening Ceremony. The following day, he traveled from Salt Lake City to Atlanta to Paris to Beijing, where he touched down on the morning of Feb. 8.

Mr. Dawson was thrilled he made it. Then he learned his bags hadn't. He luckily had packed a racing suit in his carry-on and borrowed an extra set of blades from a Latvian competitor.

Perhaps no competitors at the Games had a stranger journey through China's protocols than the Australian mixed doubles curling team of Tahli Gill and Dean Hewitt. They began their Olympics testing negative for the coronavirus but displayed acute symptoms of terrible curling form.

They lost their first seven matches in round robin play before their Games got worse: Ms. Gill received the dreaded call.

She gathered her things and headed for isolation, expecting to be removed from the Olympic Village. The Australian Olympic Committee instead delivered good news. The group of local and international doctors, the "Medical Expert Panel," reviewed her case and decided that Ms. Gill was free to compete because she wasn't contagious. Her match against reigning silver medalist Switzerland was in 15 minutes.

Ms. Gill rifled through her luggage, pulled out her uniform and rushed to the curling venue where she and Mr. Hewitt put together their first victory of the Games. "It has literally been the craziest, craziest 24 hours," she said. "My bags are still packed."

The Beijing Games has had its share of non-pandemic controversies, which seem to follow every Olympics. Norwegian and German ski jumpers were furious about their suit disqualifications. China and South Korea bickered over controversial replays in short-track speedskating.

The medal ceremony awarding the Russian Olympic Committee the gold medal in team figure skating was delayed this week because its teenage superstar tested positive for a banned substance before the Olympics. Russia, which remains officially banned for its state-sponsored doping program during the Winter Games it hosted, has said it would fight to save the medal.

As in all Games, the victories have been thrilling, including the performances of U.S. gold medalists Lindsey Jacobellis, Nathan Chen and Chloe Kim. But under the pall of Covid-19, the defeats seem more agonizing.

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| | <p>Mikaela Shiffrin hoped to have two gold medals after her first two events. On Wednesday, she finished the giant slalom in tears after crashing for the second time in two days. The sight of a despondent Ms. Shiffrin brought back memories of last summer's first pandemic Olympics in Tokyo, where superstar gymnast Simone Biles found herself unable to perform her midair acrobatics.</p> <p>Ms. Biles tweeted three hearts Wednesday in support of Ms. Shiffrin.</p> <p>"It feels like there's a lot to be disappointed about right now. But you know what? The throat-swab test, they make you choke a little bit, but they're not that bad," said Ms. Shiffrin, a gold medalist in 2014 and 2018, displaying a perspective that could come only at Olympics staged in a pandemic.</p> <p>One unofficial Olympic event in Beijing was packing, unpacking and repacking, as Ms. Meyers Taylor learned after having to move living quarters. After a week in isolation, the U.S. flag-bearer finally got the test results she and her family had waited for.</p> <p>"ALL NEGATIVE!" she tweeted Wednesday.</p> <p>Despite the lost training hours and the days of mind-numbing boredom, Ms. Meyers Taylor was released in time for her to chase a fourth Olympic bobsled medal. Her first chance is after the Super Bowl on Sunday.</p> <p>There will still be a week until the Closing Ceremony.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Judge allows force to remove protesters |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-canada-business-leaders-demand-end-to-bridge-blockade-11644592039?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos3 |
| GIST | <p>A Canadian judge said he would grant police permission to forcibly remove protesters who have choked off most access to a U.S.-Canada trade corridor, disrupting pockets of the auto industry and stirring concerns among North American business leaders.</p> <p>Chief Justice Geoffrey Morawetz of Ontario's Superior Court said Friday the injunction would take effect at 7 p.m. ET, to give protesters—who oppose Covid-19 vaccine mandates and other social restrictions—an opportunity to leave.</p> <p>It is unknown whether all of the roughly 150 protesters assembled late Friday afternoon near the mouth of the Ambassador Bridge would move voluntarily, with at least one group of drivers advocating that protesters resist the police. Along with the protesters, roughly 50 vehicles were parked to prevent north-south traffic.</p> <p>The decision caps a day where Canadian authorities ramped up efforts to end the protest at the bridge, which connects Detroit with Windsor, Ontario and which had been closed since Monday for traffic from the U.S. to Canada. Protesters tried to dissuade the court from issuing an injunction by agreeing Friday morning to open one lane for U.S. traffic into Canada.</p> <p>The City of Windsor and representatives for the auto industry applied for the court order.</p> <p>The bridge, one of the busiest border crossings in North America, accommodates roughly 30% of annual two-way U.S.-Canada trade, which recent U.S. data pegs at more than \$600 billion. Two-way U.S.-Canada trade of over \$28 billion in motor vehicles and auto parts was transported last year via the Ambassador Bridge, according to Statistics Canada.</p> <p>Commercial trucks have been rerouted north to the Blue Water Bridge, which crosses the St. Clair River and connects Port Huron, Mich., with Sarnia, Ontario, roughly 66 miles north of the Detroit-Windsor crossing. Truckers have faced long delays in crossing the border.</p> |

Also on Friday, the province of Ontario declared a state of emergency, citing the bridge blockade and [another protracted protest in Ottawa](#). Premier Doug Ford said Friday his cabinet would issue orders that would establish steep fines for demonstrators who block trade corridors such as highways and airports, and give authorities the power to revoke the driver's licenses of protesters in Ottawa and at the Ambassador Bridge.

One lane of the bridge had been open for drivers from Canada to head to the U.S., although the bridge operator has said traffic levels are sharply reduced.

Windsor Mayor Drew Dilkens said law-enforcement officials are coordinating on how best to enforce the injunction. He provided no details on a timeline.

"There is a segment of our population who feel left behind as we have collectively fought this virus," the mayor said of the protesters. "To that end, as a nation, it is clear that we have a lot of healing to do."

The protesters in Windsor and Ottawa have vowed to stay until Canada dropped all Covid-19 vaccine mandates. Some of the protesters in Windsor said they were inspired by the demonstration in Ottawa, which is now 15 days old and has disrupted the lives of the capital's residents.

The biggest business groups in the U.S. and Canada demanded Thursday that Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau move to clear the demonstration. Concern grew about the economic ramifications, especially supply-chain strains, from the protests in Canada.

"We respectfully urge the Canadian government to act swiftly to address the disruption to the flow of trade and its impact on manufacturers and other businesses on both sides of the border," the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, National Association of Manufacturers and the Business Roundtable said in a statement. late Thursday.

Mr. Trudeau said Friday that the border "cannot and will not remain closed" and called on protesters to leave, saying they are taking the risk of getting a criminal record or having their drivers' licenses revoked.

"Everything is on the table because this unlawful activity has to end, and it will end," Mr. Trudeau said. He said he couldn't speak in more detail about how or when the blockades would end, "because unfortunately we are concerned about violence so we're taking every precaution to keep people safe."

North American auto makers, including General Motors Co. , Stellantis NV, and Ford Motor Co. , have curtailed production this week and sent employees home in some cases because parts required for assembly couldn't be delivered because of the protest. GM said an SUV plant in Ingersoll, Ontario, cut short one work shift Friday because of disruption in parts delivery. Ford Motor Co. said Friday two factories in Ontario remained at reduced production levels.

Some Canadian auto-parts suppliers have also started to reduce production because they are unable to ship orders to the U.S.

Rob Wildeboer, executive chairman of MartinRea International Inc., one of Canada's largest automotive suppliers, said roughly a dozen of its 20 plants in the U.S. and Canada have shut down some production lines and a few are barely operating. The company typically ships goods on 36 trucks a day across the Ambassador Bridge and the Blue Water Bridge to customers in both countries. By Thursday, only a few trucks were making deliveries because of the Ambassador Bridge blockade and subsequent production halts by customers unable to obtain parts.

"As soon as you disrupt the border the supply chain breaks down pretty quickly," he said. If the Ambassador Bridge isn't reopened by Monday he said he expects parts shortages will force MartinRea and its customers to further curtail production.

MartinRea produces large auto parts such as fuel lines and welded metal structures such as car floors.

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| | <p>“What started as a local protest has escalated into a national emergency,” said Goldy Hyder, president of the Business Council of Canada, which represents the country’s top chief executives. “It is imperative that the federal government lead a nationally coordinated effort to clear the blockades and restore order.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 US, Russia pull diplomatic staff out Ukraine |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-to-talk-with-putin-as-u-s-warns-of-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-11644659540?mod=hp_lead_pos1 |
| GIST | <p>LVIV, Ukraine—The U.S. suspended consular services in Kyiv and ordered most embassy staff to depart after warning that a Russian military invasion could happen at any moment, as Moscow also began withdrawing its diplomatic presence in Ukraine.</p> <p>The U.S. Embassy in Ukraine said Saturday that it has ordered the departure of most direct-hire employees from Ukraine because of the growing threat of invasion. The embassy said it would operate limited consular services out of the western city of Lviv.</p> <p>Nearly 200 diplomats are expected to leave the embassy. Nonessential personnel and the families of U.S. diplomats had been ordered to leave last month.</p> <p>“Despite a prudent reduction in our diplomatic staff, our core embassy team will remain in Ukraine with our many dedicated Ukrainian colleagues, the Department of State, USAID and other U.S. personnel across the world,” the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv said in a statement.</p> <p>The White House approved a Pentagon plan for U.S. troops in Poland to help thousands of Americans likely to flee Ukraine if Russia attacks, as the Biden administration tries to avoid an evacuation similar to its chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan.</p> <p>Some of the 1,700 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division were being deployed to Poland to bolster that ally with checkpoints, tent camps and other temporary facilities inside Poland’s border with Ukraine in preparation to serve arriving Americans, U.S. officials said. The troops aren’t authorized to enter Ukraine and won’t evacuate Americans or fly aircraft missions from inside the country, officials said.</p> <p>Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Saturday that Moscow has decided on a “certain optimization” of staffing at the Russian Embassy in Kyiv and its consulates in Kharkiv, Odessa and Lviv because it feared “certain provocations by the Kyiv regime or third nations.” She said consular services will continue. A security guard outside the Russian Embassy in Kyiv and residents of nearby buildings said Saturday that they haven’t seen any signs of evacuation so far.</p> <p>The White House warned on Saturday that Russia could invade Ukraine at any time with major military action and urged Americans to leave the country by Sunday. Russia, which has massed some 130,000 troops along Ukrainian borders in recent weeks, has repeatedly denied that it seeks to invade. President Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin are slated to discuss the crisis later on Saturday.</p> <p>American citizens won’t be able to secure routine support with passport issues, visa services, or any of the other routine consular services that are customarily provided from U.S. embassies and consulates, the State Department said Saturday. A substantial number of Americans have chosen to remain in Ukraine despite the State Department strongly urging them to leave, a senior administration official said.</p> <p>“It’s past time for private citizens to leave Ukraine,” the official said. “American citizens should not expect that the U.S. military is going to come rescue them in Ukraine at the last minute.”</p> <p>The Ukrainian foreign ministry on Saturday said the country is ready for any scenario.</p> |

“At this moment, it is critically important to retain calm, consolidate inside the country, and avoid actions that undermine stability and sow panic,” it said in a statement.

Other Western embassies are also pulling out staff from the Ukrainian capital, with some of them setting up satellite headquarters in the city of Lviv near the Polish border, seen as relatively secure even if Russia invades

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Saturday said “we’ve been continuing to focus on our embassy” in Kyiv and that the department would provide more information in the coming hours.

“We continue to see very troubling signs of Russian escalation, including new forces arriving around Ukraine’s borders,” he said following a meeting with Fijian acting Prime Minister Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum.

Mr. Blinken spoke Saturday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. The State Department said Mr. Blinken told his Russian counterpart the diplomatic path to resolving the crisis remains open but it would require Moscow “to de-escalate and engage in good-faith discussions.”

Mr. Lavrov accused the U.S. of leading a “propaganda campaign about “Russian aggression against Ukraine” in the phone call with Mr. Blinken, according to the Russian foreign ministry.

Hotels in Lviv are already packed with foreign embassy staff and contractors. Many international organizations and companies operating in Ukraine have set the evacuation of the Russian Embassy as a trigger event for their own departure.

The State Department last month ordered the departure of all family members of employees at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, while authorizing departure for certain embassy employees. At the time, a senior State Department official said the moves were “prudent precautions taken for the sake of the safety of U.S. citizens and government personnel, and they in no way undermine our support for or our commitment to Ukraine.”

The secretary said he had spoken recently with several of his counterparts, including Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. He was scheduled to speak later in the day with U.K. Foreign Secretary Liz Truss.

“We have a remarkable level of unity and common purpose,” Mr. Blinken said. “We and our allies have made this crystal clear to Moscow: If President Putin decides to take military action, we will swiftly impose severe economic sanctions. The coordination with allies and partners around the globe will bolster Ukraine’s ability to defend itself. We will reinforce our allies on the eastern flank of NATO.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 CIA secretly collected Americans bulk data |
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| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/11/declassified-documents-reveal-cia-collecting-information-americans |
| GIST | <p>The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has been secretly collecting Americans’ private information in bulk, according to newly declassified documents that prompted condemnation from civil liberties watchdogs.</p> <p>The surveillance program was exposed on Thursday by two Democrats on the Senate intelligence committee. Ron Wyden of Oregon and Martin Heinrich of New Mexico alleged that the CIA has long concealed it from the public and Congress.</p> <p>The pair sent a letter to top intelligence officials arguing that the program operates “outside the statutory framework that Congress and the public believe govern this collection”.</p> |

Wyden and Heinrich added: “It is critical that Congress not legislate without awareness of a ... [CIA](#) program, and that the American public not be misled into believe that the reforms in any reauthorization legislation fully cover the IC’s collection of their records.”

The two senators, frequent critics of the CIA, said they are not allowed to reveal specifics about what type of data has been subject to bulk collection and called for more details about the program to be declassified. Large parts of the letter, which was sent in April 2021 and declassified on Thursday, and documents released by the CIA were blacked out.

The CIA and National Security Agency (NSA) have a foreign mission and are generally barred from investigating Americans or US businesses. But the spy agencies’ sprawling collection of foreign communications often snares Americans’ messages and data incidentally.

The senators’ disclosure triggered fresh concerns about privacy protections. [Patrick Toomey](#), a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union, said: “These reports raise serious questions about the kinds of information the CIA is vacuuming up in bulk and how the agency exploits that information to spy on Americans.

“The CIA conducts these sweeping surveillance activities without any court approval, and with few, if any, safeguards imposed by Congress.”

Edward Snowden, a former NSA contractor who blew the whistle on the mass surveillance of Americans’ telephone records, [wrote on Twitter](#): “You are about to witness an enormous political debate in which the spy agencies and their apologists on TV tell you this is normal and OK and the CIA doesn’t know how many Americans are in the database or even how they got there anyway. But it is not ok.”

And Justin Amash, a former Republican congressman, [tweeted](#): “Rogue agencies like the NSA, FBI, and CIA are a more serious threat to liberty in America than the enemies they claim to protect us from.”

There have long been concerns about what information the intelligence community collects domestically, driven in part by previous violations of Americans’ civil liberties. The FBI secretly recorded the conversations of Martin Luther King; the CIA investigated whether the anti-Vietnam war movement had links to foreign countries.

On Thursday the CIA released a series of redacted recommendations about the program issued by an oversight panel known as the privacy and civil liberties oversight board. According to the document, a pop-up box warns CIA analysts using the program that seeking any information about US citizens or others covered by privacy laws requires a foreign intelligence purpose.

Additional documents released by the CIA revealed limited details about a program to collect financial data against the Islamic State terrorist group. That program also has incidentally snared some records held by Americans.

Kristi Scott, the agency’s privacy and civil liberties officer, said in a statement: “CIA recognizes and takes very seriously our obligation to respect the privacy and civil liberties of US persons in the conduct of our vital national security mission. CIA is committed to transparency consistent with our obligation to protect intelligence sources and methods.”

Intelligence agencies are required to take steps to protect US information, including redacting the names of any Americans from reports unless they are deemed relevant to an investigation. The process of removing redactions is known as “unmasking.”

Wyden and Heinrich have previously pushed for more transparency. Nearly a decade ago, a question Wyden posed to America’s spy chief presaged Snowden’s revelations about the NSA’s mass surveillance programs.

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| | <p>In 2013 Wyden asked then-national intelligence director James Clapper if the NSA collected “any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans.” Clapper initially responded, “No.” He later said, “Not wittingly.”</p> <p>Later that year Snowden revealed the NSA’s access to bulk data through US internet companies and hundreds of millions of call records from telecommunications providers. Reports in the Guardian and Washington Post generated worldwide controversy and new legislation in Congress.</p> <p>Clapper would later apologise in a letter to the Senate intelligence committee, admitting that his response to Wyden was “clearly erroneous”.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 US: Indo-Pacific stability in danger |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/11/russian-aggression-towards-ukraine-could-jeopardise-indo-pacific-stability-says-us-after-quad-meeting |
| GIST | <p>The stability of the Indo-Pacific will also be in danger if Russia is allowed to threaten Ukraine with impunity, the US secretary of state has warned during a visit to Australia.</p> <p>Antony Blinken said on Friday there were “very troubling signs of Russian escalation”, adding: “We’re in a window when an invasion could begin at any time – and to be clear, that includes during the Olympics.”</p> <p>He said the US would continue to draw down its embassy in Kyiv and reiterated calls for any American citizens who remain in Ukraine to leave immediately, following Joe Biden’s comment that “things could go crazy quickly”.</p> <p>After joining with his Australian, Indian and Japanese counterparts for a meeting of the Quad in Melbourne, Blinken made the case that allowing Russia to further invade Ukraine would have far wider consequences and could embolden other countries, such as China, to pursue military aggression.</p> <p>Russia, he said, was challenging the principles that “one country can’t simply change the borders of another by force” or “dictate to another its choices, its policies, with whom it will associate”.</p> <p>“If we allow those principles to be challenged with impunity, even if it’s half the world away in Europe, that will have an impact here as well – others are watching,” Blinken told reporters.</p> <p>“Others are looking to all of us to see how we respond. So that’s why it’s so important that we have this solidarity: that we do everything possible, through diplomacy, to try to avert a conflict and prevent aggression – but equally, to be resolute if Russia renews its aggression.”</p> <p>Russia has accused the west of ignoring its requests for security guarantees, including an assurance that Ukraine never join Nato.</p> <p>Blinken was in Melbourne for a meeting with foreign ministers of the Quad, an increasingly active diplomatic grouping that is viewed warily by China, which sees it as an effort to contain its influence.</p> <p>The meeting comes a week after China’s Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin of Russia signed a joint statement calling on the west to “abandon the ideologised approaches of the cold war”, as the two leaders showcased their warming relationship in Beijing at the start of the Winter Olympics.</p> <p>This so-called “no limits” agreement was one of the developments discussed at Friday’s meeting of the Quad foreign ministers.</p> <p>The Australian foreign minister, Marise Payne, said Russia and China’s agreement was “concerning because it doesn’t represent a global order that squares with those ambitions for freedom and openness and sovereignty and the protection of territorial integrity”.</p> |

Speaking at a joint news conference with her Quad counterparts, Payne said rules and norms were “under pressure, in particular from authoritarian regimes”.

“Australia, in our actions, works to support a world order that favours freedom – where rules, not power and coercion, resolve disputes,” she said.

Payne reiterated Australia’s “strong support for Ukraine sovereignty and territorial integrity” and signalled Australia was ready to join an international sanctions package targeted at Russia.

Australia, she said, would “continue to support our allies and partners to deter this sort of aggression and to raise the costs of this kind of behaviour”.

Japan’s foreign minister, Yoshimasa Hayashi, said his country would continue to collaborate with the international community and “take appropriate responses”.

Friday’s meeting was productive, said India’s minister of external affairs, Dr S. Jaishankar. He said the Quad had a positive agenda, including on vaccine distribution. He said the Quad stood “for something, not against somebody”.

The joint statement issued by the Quad foreign ministers did not directly name China, but stressed “the importance of adherence to international law” to meet “challenges to the maritime rules-based order, including in the South and East China Seas” – where China is engaged in territorial disputes.

Clearly alluding to China, the statement also said the Quad countries “oppose coercive economic policies and practices that run counter to this system and will work collectively to foster global economic resilience against such actions”.

The Quad would support neighbours in the Indo-Pacific region to “build resilience and counter disinformation”, it said. It would also assist countries in the region “to address the growing threat of ransomware, by strengthening capacity building to ensure resilient cyber security and to counter cybercrime”.

A year after the military coup in Myanmar, the foreign ministers said they were “gravely” concerned about the crisis in the south-east Asian country. They called for “an end to violence, the release of all those arbitrarily detained, including foreigners, and unhindered humanitarian access”.

The group also condemned North Korea for its “destabilising ballistic missile launches in violation of UN Security Council resolutions”.

Earlier, the Australian prime minister, Scott Morrison, met with the visiting foreign ministers and said he appreciated their support as Australia weathered “coercion and pressure” from China.

“We live in a very fragile, fragmented and contested world, and that is no more accentuated than here in our Indo-Pacific,” Morrison told the earlier meeting.

Blinken said a confrontation with China was not inevitable, but “we share concerns that in recent years China has been acting more aggressively, a whole lot more aggressively in the region, and, indeed, potentially beyond”.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 UK, Russia cooperation ‘close to zero’ |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/11/cooperation-between-uk-and-russia-close-to-zero-wallace-told-by-kremlin |

Russia's defence minister has described levels of cooperation with Britain as "close to zero" and in danger of going into "negative" territory as he received the UK defence secretary, [Ben Wallace](#), in Moscow for talks meant to de-escalate tensions with the west.

Sergei Shoigu began his meeting with Wallace by attacking the UK's deliveries of lethal arms and military trainers to [Ukraine](#), which Wallace claims would only be useful for defence in case of a potential invasion.

"I would like to see the reason why the United Kingdom is sending special forces to Ukraine and until when [they] will be there," Shoigu said.

The talks on Friday marked a second round of British-Russian diplomacy following the foreign secretary [Liz Truss' meeting with her Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov](#), who complained that the talks resembled a discussion of the "mute with the deaf".

By contrast, Wallace sought to emphasise the professional nature of Friday's meeting with Shoigu, where he warned [Russia](#) about the "tragic" consequences of an offensive in Ukraine and said he had received Moscow's assurances that it was not planning to launch an invasion.

"Shoigu is a professional and very experienced minister," Wallace said following the "frank and constructive" talks. "When they say they aren't going to invade Ukraine we take it seriously but look at the actions that accompany it."

Wallace said he had not seen signs yet of a de-escalation by the Kremlin, pointing to [Russia's deployment](#) of more than half of its offensive military forces near the border and saying the country is in position to launch a large offensive into Ukraine if it decides to.

But he also said he sought to "address some of the issues raised in Russia's draft treaty", a document published by its foreign ministry that includes demands that Nato remove its infrastructure from eastern [Europe](#) and publicly pledge not to admit Ukraine into the military alliance.

"We can try and move on to where we can resolve our issues together through diplomacy, through other actions, and through confidence-building measures," he said he told Shoigu during meeting. Asked to evaluate the level of relations following the meeting, Wallace said they were "above zero".

Wallace also defended British deliveries of arms, including antitank missiles to Ukraine, saying they were useful only for defensive purposes and that British military trainers would return to the UK "pretty soon".

Wallace and Shoigu were pictured shaking hands under a portrait of allied military leaders following the taking of the Reichstag in 1945. The two men also exchanged gifts. Wallace received a plaque from an Arctic convoy ship and Shoigu a ceremonial sword.

Western intelligence agencies increasingly believe that Vladimir Putin has now put in place enough troops to attempt an invasion, a sentiment reflected in warnings in the last 24 hours from both Joe Biden and Boris Johnson. Nevertheless, they continue to believe no final decision by the Russian leader has been made.

A number of invasion scenarios are considered possible, but there is a prevailing belief that any military intervention ordered by Putin would be designed to achieve regime change in Kyiv. That could see a lightning attack, aimed at encircling the capital, with the intention of forcing the collapse of [Volodymyr Zelenskyy's](#) government, and trying to install a pro-Russian regime without urban warfare.

Johnson emphasised on Thursday that any invasion would amount to a massive miscalculation by Putin because Ukraine would "fight and they will resist very strongly". Any belief in the Kremlin that a Russian intervention would be welcome by anything other than a tiny minority was mistaken, British ministers said.

On Thursday, representatives of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany met in Berlin, to try to hash out a roadmap towards implementing the Minsk accords, signed in 2015 to bring an end to the active phase of conflict.

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, has made [resurrecting the Minsk deal](#) the key plank of his diplomatic attempts to avoid Russian military action and he pushed the idea during his visits to Moscow and Kyiv earlier this week.

While Zelenskiy has publicly backed the accord, in private Ukrainian officials say fulfilling it would be politically impossible given public opinion in Ukraine, and would give Moscow a permanent say in the country's politics.

After nine hours of talks, the sides broke up close to midnight having failed to sign any kind of joint document, merely agreeing to keep dialogue going.

Russia's representative at the talks, Dmitry Kozak, said the "key disagreement" was that Kyiv refused to open direct negotiations with representatives of the breakaway territories. Ukraine believes that doing so would legitimise what are in effect Russian puppet regimes. Kozak accused Kyiv of sabotaging the talks.

"A negative result is still a result, we now have full clarity about what the statements of different politicians about adhering to the Minsk agreements mean," Kozak said on Friday.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Covid test costs around the world |
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| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/11/how-much-does-a-covid-test-cost-around-the-world |
| GIST | <p>In Australia, a federal scheme introduced at the end of January allows pensioners and concession card holders to access up to 10 free rapid antigen tests over three months through their chemist. But the scheme got off to a difficult start, with supply issues hampering attempts to procure the tests. In January the competition regulator raised concerns that rapid antigen tests often cost between A\$20 and A\$30 (£15-£20) per test and sometimes more than A\$70 a test through smaller retail outlets, despite wholesale costs ranging from A\$3.95 to A\$11.45.</p> <p>In Belgium the price of an antigen self-test sold in pharmacies is around €6-€8 (£5-£7), more expensive than in neighbouring countries, such as France and the Netherlands, although they are available in Belgian supermarkets for about €3. Prices have come down and are expected to fall further: one big pharmacy chain announced this week they had begun selling tests for €1.99. While a PCR test, which costs about €41, is free for people with symptoms, or may be reimbursed by health insurance, self-tests usually have to be funded by individuals. The Belgian consumer association Test-Achats/Test Aankoop estimated this week that a family of four could spend €250 a month on Covid tests, hand sanitiser and face masks.</p> <p>Self-administered tests in France cost between €4 and €5 in pharmacies and about €1.25 in supermarket multipacks. Lateral flow tests and PCR tests administered in pharmacies, laboratories and testing centres (both of which give you a result with a QR code allowing you to travel, for example) are free for all who are registered with the French healthcare system and fully vaccinated. People who are not in the system (tourists, for example) and those who are not fully vaccinated pay about €25 for a lateral flow and up to €45 for a PCR.</p> <p>Germany abolished its system of free rapid coronavirus testing – used by Germans to get into venues such as theatres and football stadiums – in October. Unvaccinated people – except for pregnant women, children, or those advised against getting a vaccine on medical grounds – had to pay for the tests. The hope was that people would no longer rely on the test system as a way of avoiding getting a vaccine. However, a month later, free tests were reintroduced as authorities struggled to curb rapidly rising infection rates.</p> <p>In South Africa rapid antigen tests sell for 380 ZAR (£18.50), and PCR tests double that.</p> |

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| | <p>Testing regimes vary across Spain's 17 self-governing regions. In the Madrid region, the government has so far distributed 5m free antigen tests that can be picked up from pharmacies in and around the capital. In mid-January, the Spanish government capped the price of antigen tests on sale in pharmacies at €2.94. Before the cap was introduced, test kits had been selling for about €10 and were not always available.</p> <p>In Thailand, antigen test kits are sold online, in convenience stores and pharmacies, with prices starting at about 50 baht (£1.13). The government has also started selling antigen tests for 35 baht (79p) at eight locations in Bangkok and online. If you want to travel to a tourist destination, you may be required to take a test before entering, and this can be more expensive. The cost of PCR tests ranges from 1,300 baht in some areas to as much as 4,500 baht.</p> <p>In the US, the cost and access to rapid antigen and PCR testing varies considerably depending on where you live and what health insurance you have, if any. A rapid antigen test can cost about \$15 (£11) in a pharmacy or supermarket, but since January there has been a large increase in free testing sites across the country, as well as millions of test kits for schools. PCR tests are available at private clinics, costing \$100 or more, but you can also get them free from some hospitals and clinics, though access is very variable. Since 15 January, private health insurance companies have been required to cover the costs of up to eight rapid home tests. For the 28 million or so without health insurance, the Biden administration said it would buy a billion free tests, which people could request online or at local health clinics and pharmacies, though it's unclear how many have been secured and distributed so far.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 FDA slows push to vax children under five |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/11/fda-covid-vaccine-children-under-five |
| GIST | <p>US regulators on Friday put the brakes on their push to speed Pfizer's Covid vaccine to children under five, creating major uncertainty about how soon the shots could become available.</p> <p>The Food and Drug Administration had urged Pfizer and its partner BioNTech to apply for authorization of extra-low doses of its vaccine for the youngest children before studies were even finished – citing the toll the Omicron variant has taken on children.</p> <p>Next week, FDA advisers were supposed to publicly debate if youngsters should start getting two shots before it is clear if they would actually need a third.</p> <p>But Friday, the FDA reversed course and said it had become clear it needed to wait for data on how well that third shot works for this age group. Pfizer said in a statement that it expected the data by early April.</p> <p>FDA's vaccine chief Dr Peter Marks said he hoped parents would understand that the decision to delay was part of the agency's careful review and high scientific standards.</p> <p>"We take our responsibility for reviewing these vaccines very seriously because we're parents as well," Marks told reporters during a teleconference.</p> <p>Pfizer's early data showed two of the extra-low doses were safe for children under five and strong enough to give good protection to babies as young as six months. But once children reached the pre-school age – the two- to four-year-olds – two doses did not rev up enough immunity.</p> <p>And a study of a third dose is not finished yet – meaning the FDA was considering whether to authorize two shots for now with potentially a third cleared later, something highly unusual.</p> <p>On Friday, the FDA did not say exactly what new data Pfizer was providing, except that it involved the critical issue of a third dose.</p> <p>"We believe additional information regarding evaluation of a third dose should be considered as part of our decision-making," the agency said in a statement.</p> |

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| | The nation's 18 million children under five are the only age group not yet eligible for vaccination. |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 World experts react: England to end curbs |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/11/world-experts-react-to-england-ending-covid-curbs |
| GIST | <p>The UK's prime minister, Boris Johnson, announced this week that he aimed to abolish all Covid regulations, including the requirement to isolate after testing positive, in England from 24 February.</p> <p>Here's what experts around the world think of that plan, which would make England something of an outlier when it comes to coronavirus precautions.</p> <p>France</p> <p>France is unlikely to follow England in abandoning all coronavirus measures before late March or early April, according to Arnaud Fontanet, a senior epidemiologist at the Pasteur Institute and a member of the government's scientific advisory council.</p> <p>Fontanet said measures such as mask wearing, home working and quarantine remained vital in order to slow the number of infections and keep hospital admissions down. "Allowing the virus a free run would be a fundamental error," he said.</p> <p>"Quite small changes in behaviour can really influence the dynamic. Reducing contacts now by just 20% – a bit of home working, wearing masks in indoor public spaces – will halve the number of hospital admissions in a fortnight; we know this."</p> <p>Fontanet added that France's vaccine pass, which has been needed since August to access leisure venues – including cafes and restaurants – and use long-distance public transport was also likely to remain in force until spring. "Vaccination, including boosters, is still key."</p> <p>He said infections had been falling, "but hospitals are under very heavy pressure and will remain so for some time. It's too soon to lift restrictions now."</p> <p>Although societies will "need to learn to live with the virus", he said, new variants will emerge and "we will have to decide what is acceptable. Do we accept 300 deaths a day, or are we prepared to reduce contacts again? Societies will have to decide, and different societies may decide differently."</p> <p>Germany</p> <p>"Britain's management of the pandemic is being watched with interest in Germany," said Johannes Knobloch, an infection prevention specialist at Hamburg's University Medical Centre.</p> <p>"It strikes me as quite brave to lift all restrictions at the same time. I would have thought it possible to keep in place some measures that aren't too troublesome or intrusive – such as mandatory mask-wearing on public transport – but would still slow down the dynamic of new infections.</p> <p>"Britain's vaccination rates are encouraging, but the big challenge in the coming months will be to protect those for whom vaccines don't offer protection, such as people undergoing cancer therapy."</p> <p>German states this week took steps to lift some restrictions, such as the rule whereby only those with proof of vaccination or recent recovery are allowed to access non-essential shops. Other rules, including FFP2 mask mandates in shops and on public transport and vaccine passport checks at restaurants and bars, remain in place.</p> <p>"I don't see Germany going down the UK's path quite so quickly," said Knobloch. "But then you need to bear in mind there are broader philosophical differences in our health system, with avoidance of death still playing a fundamental part in the German system, while Britain's system places more emphasis on maintaining the ability to work."</p> |

Spain

Prof Rafael Bengoa, a former World [Health](#) Organization health systems director who is now co-director of the Institute for Health and Strategy in Bilbao, said that while the lifting of restrictions in England would doubtless prove popular, it was premature.

“Because of our bias to normalcy, people want to believe it’s over, which is what politicians are saying,” said Bengoa. “But most of us in public health across Europe are saying that it’s not quite over and it’s not like the flu.”

He said lifting restrictions – especially the use of face masks in interior spaces – would slow down the descent rate of the Omicron wave because people would continue to get infected.

Bengoa also said that people who tested positive for the virus needed to stay in home quarantine for five to seven days. “If you over-normalise the situation – if you lift everything and you say, ‘This is over’ – people will not stay at home for those five or seven days,” he said.

“If you go out and infect children who are not completely vaccinated yet, and you go out and infect vulnerable people and immunocompromised people – and those three groups are not small in numbers – you’re going out to infect people who are still vulnerable. And since this is not like the flu, and it’s quite serious and you can also have long Covid with this, why is it that one needs to precipitate the lifting of restrictions so fast?”

Bengoa said that restrictions could be lifted in two months’ time, but added that Spain’s decision to maintain the use of masks in interior spaces and require people who test positive to self-isolate for seven days would accelerate the containment of the Omicron wave.

Italy

Italy has among the strictest Covid rules in Europe, with health passes required for everything from getting on a bus to going to work, and while the country is cautiously relaxing restrictions as infections and hospitalisations fall – the outdoor mask rule was dropped on Friday – scientists are perplexed by England’s plan to scrap quarantine rules for people who test positive for Covid-19, especially with the two countries still registering stubbornly high daily death rates.

“These are political choices, not scientific ones,” said Roberto Burioni, a professor of microbiology and virology at Vita-Salute San Raffaele University in Milan. “We’ve never quarantined people who have the flu, but the flu doesn’t kill two or three hundred people a day.”

Greece

In Greece, which has one of Europe’s highest Covid-19 death rates, reaction to the decision to end restrictions was relatively upbeat.

“I think the situation in the UK allows for relaxation of the measures,” said leading epidemiologist Gkikas Magiorkinis. “Given the country’s good vaccination and epidemiological profile, it seems to be a reasonable move.”

Magiorkinis, who sits on the committee of experts that advises the government, said Athens would likely follow suit if, at this point in the pandemic, Greece had similar rates of fatalities, hospitalisations and intubations. “We would end up doing the same,” he said.

“If the health system is not under heavy pressure, we need to use the opportunity to try and return to normality, because if, in five months’ time, there is another mutation, people might not listen to us, and that would be serious.”

China

In the past two years, Britain has been used by Chinese media as an unsuccessful example in the fight against Covid. Some Chinese media outlets and social media users call the UK’s approach “lying flat”

– *tang ping* - a term often used to describe individuals who strive for nothing more than what is absolutely essential.

State media cite criticisms over Johnson's announcement, but Chinese experts have tried to understand the logic behind it, with some expressing admiration. England is now the first country prepared to achieve herd immunity, said Prof Chen Wenzhi of Chongqing Medical University. "This is because their scientists have said the peak of the new variant had passed ... and suggested the end of the pandemic is in sight."

Zhang Wenhong, one of the country's best-known epidemiologists, recently used the UK as an example to persuade the Chinese public to get vaccinated as soon as possible. Citing data from the UK Health Security Agency, he said the reason why some countries could end restrictions was because vaccines had led to a dramatic reduction in hospitalisation and mortality rates.

New Zealand

In New Zealand, the epidemiologist and public health expert Prof Michael Baker said the data on hospitalisations and deaths from Covid-19 in the UK told their own story. "The numbers, I think, are screaming out a message [that] the pandemic response has been very poorly managed – the waste of lives, the excessive periods under lockdown and the flip-flopping policies."

While death rates in the UK were down from their peak, he noted: "In New Zealand that would still be [equivalent to] 20 people dying a day – we would regard that as high mortality ... On the face of it, it would certainly seem premature to be relaxing all safeguards."

Inevitably, Baker said, the results would be felt more harshly by some than others – frontline workers, elderly people, ill people, the immuno-compromised. "That partly reflects just how the virus behaves and who's most vulnerable, but also the priorities of different governments. Most of us would regard that the balance is not right in the UK in that respect – that there's a need for greater emphasis on protecting the most vulnerable."

"In terms of scientific depth, the UK is currently amongst the leading contributors to understanding [the] virus, and combating it at a science level ... they gave us the AstraZeneca vaccine and some of the best large population studies in the world," he said. "The science is absolutely top – it's just the policy translation has been shockingly poor. That's one of the frustrating things. We'd normally look to the UK ... and they have not given us the leadership we'd hope for."

Australia

Stuart Turville, associate professor in the immunovirology and pathogenesis program at the Kirby Institute, University of New South Wales, points out that the UK's "base of immunity" is high and that "the waves of Delta and Omicron (albeit high) did not translate into the deaths that they observed in earlier waves". But, he said: "There are always people in our community where vaccination is not an option – for example, because their vaccine response is not strong."

The virologist's primary concern was that Omicron would be replaced by another variant. "We planned for Delta and got Omicron, and although we didn't have the lockdowns of the past, it did create significant disruption, not to mention those that also sadly passed away. I have always said it is better to be vigilant and cautious."

He added: "It's very difficult to predict this virus, though. It has made a fool of many of us."

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Ontario declares state of emergency |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/11/ontario-state-emergency-threatens-fines-jail-time-end-blockade |

GIST

The province of Ontario has invoked a state of emergency and says it will use the threat of hefty fines, jail time and vehicle licence seizures to [end a blockade](#) that has crippled trade between Canada and the United States.

Border traffic at the Ambassador Bridge, which links Windsor to Detroit, has been shut down since Monday as part of a nationwide protest against pandemic restrictions, snarling nearly C\$300m (US\$235m) of trade each day.

On Friday afternoon a court granted the city of Windsor an injunction to forcibly remove protesters from the international bridge. Mayor Drew Dilkens has called the blockade “a national crisis” and officials in the US have grown impatient with the stalemate. The injunction was due to come into effect at 7pm in order to give protestors time to leave.

The ruling came after Ontario premier Doug Ford announced the province’s plan to combat the “disruption, intimidation, and chaos” of protests that have paralyzed the country’s most critical trade route. “There will be consequences for these actions, and they will be severe,” he said.

He also called on protesters to end a [“siege” of Ottawa](#) that has dragged on for more than two weeks, saying they were effectively holding residents of the city hostage.

“It’s time to leave. And it’s time to do so peacefully.”

Penalties for blocking key routes, including bridges and highways, would include fines as high as C\$100,000 and up to a year in jail, Ford said.

Justin Trudeau described the measures announced by Ford as “responsible and necessary”, adding that his government was looking at various options to end the blockade.

“Everything is on the table because this unlawful activity has to end, and it will end,” the prime minister told reporters Friday.

Trudeau said officials were worried about the prospect of violence but said that bringing in the military was a last resort. “We’re taking every precaution to keep people safe, but the absolute safest way for this to end is for everyone to return to your communities, now.”

The prime minister also promised US president Joe Biden quick action to end a crisis that has disrupted North America’s auto industry.

Adding to earlier calls for action by US officials and business leaders, Biden expressed concerns over auto plant closures and production slowdowns during a phone call with Trudeau on Friday, the White House said in a statement.

“The two leaders agreed that the actions of the individuals who are obstructing travel and commerce between our two countries are having significant direct impacts on citizens’ lives and livelihoods,” the statement said.

The US homeland security secretary, Alejandro Mayorkas, and the transportation secretary, Pete Buttigieg, [urged their Canadian counterparts “to use federal powers to resolve this situation at our joint border”](#), a White House official said on Thursday.

Ahead of Ford’s announcement, protesters opened one lane of the bridge to allow traffic through. But as the delays ripple through the economy, a number of automakers, some of the largest employers in the region, have been forced to scale back production.

“Today, the best advice I have for people illegally blocking the Ambassador Bridge is to GO HOME,” tweeted Flavio Volpe, head of the Automotive Parts Manufacturers’ Association. “The immeasurable

damage you have SELFISHLY done to [Canada] will be shouldered by your fellow citizens who will be talking about you for the next 30 years. ‘I lost my job for your stunt.’”

Friday’s announcement by Ford, leader of the Progress Conservative party of Ontario, marks his government’s second legal action against protesters and their truck blockades. Earlier this week, his government obtained a court order to freeze any donations meant for the protesters raised through GiveSendGo, using a provision of Canada’s criminal code includes a clause that allows funds outside the country to be frozen. On Thursday, the American online fundraising platform [claimed](#) that Canada had “absolutely ZERO jurisdiction” over how the company managed its funds.

Ford’s declaration of a state of emergency in the province follows a similar declaration by the city of Ottawa last week, and comes in sharp contrast to federal Conservatives, who previously cheered on the protesters but have started backtracking their support.

On Thursday, however, the interim Conservative leader, Candice Bergen, called on protesters to dismantle their blockades and return home.

Bergen had previously described the convoy as a “passionate, patriotic and peaceful” group of Canadians concerned about freedom at a time of Covid-19 restrictions, posing for pictures with protesters.

Trudeau met with opposition leaders Thursday night, but the prime minister has so far ruled out meeting with the protesters, who have called for pandemic health measures like vaccine and mask mandates to be fully repealed.

Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan have scaled back their public health restrictions in recent days and Ontario has indicated it too might rescind certain rules.

But Ford said any decision will be made based on consultations with the province’s health officials, rejecting the notion that the protests have played a role.

“I will never ever negotiate with people that break the law,” he said.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Widening movement Ottawa trucker protest |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/11/canada-ottawa-truckers-protest-covid-vaccine-mandates |
| GIST | <p>Diesel fumes and marijuana smoke filled the air outside the Canadian parliament as a “Freedom Convoy” protest against vaccine mandates headed into a third week.</p> <p>Columns of big-rig trucks, pickups and RVs have blockaded the heart of the Canadian capital since 28 January. Camped out in the vehicles are several hundred protesters – including many children – who have driven thousands of kilometres to be here.</p> <p>Protesters have also blocked the international Ambassador Bridge between Detroit and Windsor, and two smaller border crossings with the US, prompting growing fears of serious economic impact.</p> <p>Justin Trudeau, the White House and even the US Teamsters union have called for an end to the protest. But those camped out in downtown Ottawa insist they will not leave until their demands are met: an end to Covid lockdowns and vaccine mandates.</p> <p>What began as a protest against vaccine requirements for truck drivers entering Canada has grown into a widening protest movement against all Covid public health measures, with copycat demonstrations in the US, France, Belgium, Australia and New Zealand.</p> <p>On a bone-chilling night this week, protesters gathered around open fires and propane stoves as police officers looked on, seemingly unwilling to enforce an order against bringing fuel into the city centre.</p> |

It was quieter than in the earlier days of the protest when truckers infuriated residents by honking their horns late into the night; on Monday, a court injunction was handed down banning air horns for 10 days after a class-action lawsuit by sleepless locals. Instead, a semi driver loudly gunned his engine, launching thick black plumes of exhaust into the night sky.

“It was definitely time to take a stand,” says Spencer Bautz, a 24-year-old who drove his truck here from Saskatchewan on day one. Dressed in a black cowboy hat, Bautz described vaccine mandates as “medical segregation” and argued that exclusions for the unvaccinated were an infringement of their freedoms. His views, he said, had been greatly informed by the thinking of the [psychology professor and culture war provocateur Jordan Peterson](#).

“I’m not going to pretend like I know what goes on in upper management or big government. I’m just a farm kid from Saskatchewan,” said Bautz. “But I know that anytime you talk about silencing people, anytime you talk about taking away people’s freedoms ... it’s to be taken seriously.”

Such good-versus-evil posturing is apparent in the hundreds of handmade signs that line the fence around parliament – little jabs of resistance against Covid policies that the prime minister himself said have “sucked for all Canadians”.

Lurking below the surface, though, is the same undercurrent of populism that powered the January 6 Capitol insurrection and the yellow vests movement: a powerful current fed by disinformation, conspiratorial thinking and deepening social divides.

“Wake up Canada! You are being lied to. Take the red pill and roll on!” reads a sign attached to the front grille of a parked semi. The concept of the “[red pill](#)” – which originated in The Matrix films – has become a token for incels and the far-righters who hold that they are “awake” to the way the world really works.

“Populist movements are notoriously distrustful of government,” said the Queens University assistant professor Amarnath Amarasingam, who specialises in extremism and social movements.

“They don’t trust politicians, they don’t trust the media, they don’t trust academics, they don’t trust scientists because they believe that historically, this ‘elite class’ of society has always harmed those at the bottom, the underdogs,” Amarasingam adds.

As men and women dressed in flannel hunker down in the cold with their Tim Hortons coffee cups and Canadian flags draped over their shoulders it is clear that the Freedom Convoy’s movement has crystallised. They are here to wake the rest of [Canada](#) up to the tyranny of the Liberal government and its “oppressive” vaccine mandates.

“Freedom!” bellows one man wearing the flag as a cape. “Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!” comes the response from others outside the parliament building – where earlier in the week Trudeau described the same protests as “unacceptable”.

The Freedom Convoy is quickly becoming a defining moment in Trudeau’s leadership.

The prime minister has refused to lend legitimacy to this movement by engaging with the protesters’ demands – a decision that led two Liberal party members to break rank. Meanwhile, the failure to take decisive action to break up the protest has exposed Trudeau to criticism from all other party leaders.

The discord in parliament has allowed protest organisers to become further emboldened in their demands, with some of them openly call for Trudeau to be forced from office.

The opposition Conservative party and People’s Party of Canada have both cheered the protesters on, even encouraging donations to their million-dollar crowdfunding efforts. Similarly US Republicans, including Donald Trump and Ted Cruz, have praised the convoy, with some of the protest’s funding believed to have come from south of the border.

Such support has given fresh momentum to the truckers as they launched additional protests at the Canada-US border, and tightened their grip on the capital.

On Thursday, trucks circled the Ottawa airport, clogging traffic. People flooded the local 911 number with fake calls, and some tossed around the idea of parading outside schools. Elsewhere, some journalists have reported being followed, particularly at secondary staging camps outside of the downtown core.

Amarasingam outlined several ways the standoff could end: in tragedy, in violence or because of potential in-fighting. A negotiation, at this point, seems unlikely. “If this ended in some sort of mass arrest or violence, or some sort of tragedy – someone dies or one of these propane tanks explodes – I think it’s that kind of turning point that will change the conversation,” he said.

As the protests stretch on, many local residents have become increasingly fed up with their temporary neighbours. Violent confrontations have broken out as protesters harass and insult people wearing masks. A counter-protest is planned for Saturday.

The protesters are deeply aware of the negative coverage they have earned, and now espouse peace and love to an almost aggressive degree. One trucker uses a megaphone to loudly proclaim “I love you” to anyone who walks by.

A few blocks away, Gurtek Singh – one of the few people of colour at an overwhelmingly white protest – said he was the only breadwinner in a household of six, but that the financial hit from staying off work was worth it.

As he spoke, at least a dozen protester supporters stopped to thank Singh. He smiled politely and accepted the effusive praise.

Snowflakes glistened in his bushy salt-and-pepper beard as he said that he had joined the convoy for the sake of his children, who he had kept home from school because of mandatory mask and vaccine mandates.

“No government, no other human being can tell me what’s good for my kids, other than me,” he said.

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 US to reopen Solomon Islands embassy |
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| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/12/us-plans-to-reopen-solomon-islands-embassy-in-push-to-counter-china |
| GIST | <p>The United States plans to re-establish an embassy in Solomon Islands, a senior US state department official said, as Washington seeks to beef up its presence in a region where China is rapidly expanding its influence.</p> <p>Secretary of state Antony Blinken is set to announce the opening of a new embassy on the Pacific island state during a visit to nearby Fiji – 29 years after the United States downgraded its diplomatic presence in Honiara.</p> <p>The move comes just a few months after riots in the island chain of 800,000 people in November when protesters tried to storm parliament and then went on a three-day rampage, torching much of the capital Honiara’s Chinatown.</p> <p>The unrest was sparked by opposition to veteran prime minister Manasseh Sogavare and partly fuelled by poverty, unemployment and inter-island rivalries, but anti-China sentiment also played a role.</p> <p>The United States closed its embassy in the Solomons Island capital in 1993 and is now represented by a consulate there, with an embassy in the Papua New Guinea capital of Port Moresby.</p> |

Blinken flew to Fiji after a meeting in Melbourne of the United States, Japan, India and Australia, at which the so-called Quad pledged to deepen cooperation to ensure an Indo-Pacific region free from “coercion,” a thinly veiled swipe at China’s economic and military expansion.

In a briefing on the flight, a senior US administration official told travelling reporters that “there are very clear indications that (China) want to create military relationships in the Pacific”.

“The most pressing case right now is what’s going on in the Solomon Islands. With Chinese security personnel bucking up an increasingly besieged president in a way that has caused a lot of anxieties across the region,” the official said.

China said in December [it would send police advisers](#) and riot gear to Solomon Islands as foreign peacekeepers began leaving the Pacific nation after being deployed during the deadly protests.

A subplot to November’s unrest was Sogavare’s efforts to forge closer ties with Beijing after abruptly breaking off the island’s longtime ties with Taiwan in 2019.

China balks at any official exchanges between other countries and self-ruled Taiwan, which it sees as its own territory awaiting reunification.

The Solomons government said in December it had accepted Beijing’s offer of six “liaison officers” to train its police force and equipment including shields, helmets, batons and other “non-lethal” gear.

In recent years China has stepped up pressure [to isolate Taiwan internationally](#), getting eight nations to switch diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing since 2016.

A diplomat at the US embassy in Port Moresby said the reopening of the mission in the Solomons Islands would build on US efforts to place more diplomatic staff throughout the region.

The aim was to “further engage with our Pacific neighbours, connect US programs and resources with needs on the ground, and build people-to-people ties,” the diplomat said.

The US government had provided vaccines and other help to Solomon Islands in combating the Covid-19 pandemic, the diplomat said.

The US Congress and the White House will need to approve the embassy proposal.

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Paris police halt convoys of protesters |
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| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/12/covid-pass-protesters-convoy-paris-police |
| GIST | <p>Police in Paris intercepted at least 500 vehicles attempting to enter the French capital in defiance of a police order, to take part in protests against Covid restrictions inspired by “Freedom Convoy” trucker blockades in Canada.</p> <p>The police said on Twitter that several convoys were stopped from entering at key city arteries and more than 200 motorists were handed fines.</p> <p>Elsewhere, at least two protesters were detained amid a seizure of knives, hammers and other objects in one central Parisian square.</p> <p>About 7,000 officers have been mobilised for the weekend protests. Police have created checkpoints, deployed armoured personnel carriers and set up water cannon to brace the city for the protests. So far, the police action has seemed effective.</p> |

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| | <p>Railing against the vaccination pass that France requires to enter restaurants and many other venues, protesters have tried to weave toward Paris from north, south, east and west, waving and honking at onlookers from their car windows. Some convoys sought to avoid police detection on Friday by travelling on local roads instead of the major highways leading into the capital.</p> <p>Waving French flags and shouting “freedom”, the protesters organised online, galvanised in part by truckers who have blockaded Canada’s capital and border crossings. The French action has no single leader or goal, and comes as months of protests against French government vaccination rules have been waning.</p> <p>Meanwhile, dozens of trucks and other vehicles, from tractors to a car towing a caravan, arrived in The Hague on Saturday morning as part of a “freedom convoy”, blocking an entrance to the historic parliamentary complex.</p> <p>A group of protesters joined the truckers carrying a banner emblazoned with the Dutch words “Love & freedom, no dictatorship”.</p> <p>Police urged the protesters to move to a park, where the municipality said they could demonstrate, and warned the public about traffic problems in the city.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Pierce Co. officials: adjust police reforms |
| SOURCE | https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/pierce-county-council-letter-police-reform-adjustments-washington/281-0bc8c9f6-544c-410d-bc13-e1ce04bb93c8 |
| GIST | <p>TACOMA, Wash. — The Pierce County Council has endorsed a revised version of County Executive Bruce Dammieier’s letter calling for state legislators to adjust some of last year’s reforms to policing in Washington.</p> <p>The letter specifically highlights House Bill 1310, and the adjustments that would allow police to pursue suspects and use reasonable force in more circumstances.</p> <p>Their goal is to address the surge in crime in Pierce County and throughout western Washington.</p> <p>“We’ve seen very significant increases in violent crime including homicides and assaults,” Dammieier said. “We’ve seen a significant increase in property crime, and we know that we gotta do something.”</p> <p>After some revisions, the Council signed off on the letter that calls for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clearly defining “physical force” 2. Allowing vehicular pursuit if it’s less dangerous than the offense 3. Expressly authorizing investigative detentions (Terry stops) under reasonable suspicion 4. Permitting use of force when a law enforcement officer reasonably suspects an individual possesses a firearm or dangerous weapon <p>Dammieier said the limitations in the reforms prevent deputies from being effective, such as in vehicle pursuits.</p> <p>“You can’t pursue car thieves,” he claimed. “That’s part of the reason why car thefts have gone up so dramatically in Pierce County. Because the car thieves know that law enforcement can’t pursue.”</p> <p>But LegallyBlack founder Tisha Marie said that’s not the case, because the reforms don’t forbid officers from pursuing suspects. Marie said it’s not the reforms that need to be adjusted, but the attitude within law enforcement.</p> <p>“You have words that say, ‘cannot pursue unless deemed a threat to themselves, the public, or police officers.’ But police officers don’t read the full policy,” Marie said. “They’re just like, ‘oh, these reforms</p> |

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| | <p>don't allow me to do my job, I can't pursue this assailant who stole your car.' You absolutely can, you just don't want to."</p> <p>Defining what force means has been a main point of contention between law enforcement and advocates since the reforms were implemented.</p> <p>Pierce County Councilmember Hans Zeiger hopes clearer language will address that before Pierce County loses more of its deputies.</p> <p>"Without that clarity, I am very worried that more of our working law enforcement officers are going to leave the force," he said.</p> <p>But Marie is concerned that this is a small step to regressing back to a harmful policing model for Pierce County.</p> <p>"We're going back to the fear-based policing system that we had before," Marie said. "It seems like officials are looking to make police more comfortable by increasing their power presence and incentivizing the use of force."</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Walmart drops employee mask mandate |
| SOURCE | https://www.kiro7.com/news/trending/coronavirus-walmart-drops-mask-mandate-fully-vaccinated-employees/YW4TTLQW5JCJRG5FPIXZFNBWZQ/ |
| GIST | <p>Officials with Walmart told employees on Friday that if they are fully vaccinated they will no longer be made to wear masks while working at Walmart or Sam's Club stores, with a few exceptions, according to multiple reports.</p> <p>In a memo sent Friday to employees in the U.S. and obtained by KFSM-TV, Reuters and The Dallas Morning News, the company's chief people officer, Donna Morris, and chief medical officer, Dr. John Wig, shared updates to Walmart's COVID-19 protocols.</p> <p>"Effective immediately, fully vaccinated associates will not be required to wear masks while working in any Walmart or Sam's Club facility, unless required by a state or local mandate or ordinance," the message said, according to a copy shared by KFSM. "We will continue to monitor the situation and advise of any changes."</p> <p>In line with recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Walmart officials consider a person to be fully vaccinated after they've received two doses of either the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna COVID-19 vaccines or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.</p> <p>"Unvaccinated associates will be required to continue wearing masks until further notice," officials said in the memo. "Additionally, masks will still be required for those associates who work in clinical care settings (e.g. health clinics and pharmacies) with direct patient/customer contact, regardless of vaccination status."</p> <p>Company officials added that they "support and respect an individual's choice to continue wearing" a mask even if they are fully vaccinated.</p> <p>By the end of the month, Walmart also plans to drop daily health screenings for employees outside of California, New York and Virginia, where the screenings will continue in order to meet state requirements, officials said. The company will also end its COVID-19 emergency leave policy for employees at the end of next month "except as required by state or local mandates or ordinances."</p> <p>On Friday, Walmart officials urged employees to get vaccinated against COVID-19, noting that vaccines protect well against hospitalizations and deaths caused by the viral infection.</p> |

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| | <p>“Most hospitalized patients with COVID-19 are unvaccinated,” officials said in Friday’s memo. “If you have not been vaccinated, or if you are eligible for a booster, we encourage you to get your shots as soon as possible to protect yourself, your loved ones and your community.”</p> <p>Other companies have also announced plans to end mask mandates for employees as public health officials note a drop in reported COVID-19 cases nationwide. Amazon said in a memo to employees that as of Friday, it would no longer require fully vaccinated warehouse employees to wear masks, The Wall Street Journal reported.</p> <p>As of Friday morning, nearly 76% of the U.S. population – 251.7 million people – has gotten at least one dose of any of the available COVID-19 vaccines, CDC data shows. Just over 64% of Americans, or 213.5 million people, have been fully vaccinated, and nearly 43% of those who have been fully vaccinated have gotten booster shots, according to the CDC.</p> <p>Officials have confirmed more than 77.6 million COVID-19 infections and reported over 918,000 deaths nationwide, according to numbers compiled by Johns Hopkins University.</p> <p>More than 408.2 million COVID-19 cases have been reported worldwide, resulting in 5.8 million deaths, according to the university.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Tacoma Public Utilities ending moratorium |
| SOURCE | https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/tacoma-public-utilities-shutoff-moratorium-expires-end-march/63QTGAILG5FZRB7LOEN2LVVSHY/ |
| GIST | <p>TACOMA, Wash. — After two years, Tacoma Public Utilities is ending its shutoff moratorium.</p> <p>Mayor Victoria Woodards said the moratorium will last until March 31, giving customers enough time to secure assistance and access resources, helping them to get past due balances down and apply for any payment assistance.</p> <p>“This additional time is intended to give residents enough notice to make a plan to take care of outstanding balances, including access to programs and resources that may help,” said Woodards. “We want to get these customers onto a payment plan right away and connect them with resources to catch them up on their payments so that no one loses service, especially the more financially vulnerable in our community.”</p> <p>Once the moratorium ends, past-due accounts will be placed on an interest-free, 24-month installment plan.</p> <p>The utility said nearly \$30 million in unpaid bills have accumulated since the start of the pandemic and 27,000 customers have past due balances.</p> <p>While there will be an installment plan at the moratorium, the utility said customers “must stay current on new usage charges while paying off past due balances to prevent disconnection.”</p> <p>“We need TPU customers to take action now,” said Steve Hatcher, manager of Customer Services. “Our team is here to help with a flexible, hands-on approach, and our goal is for all TPU customers to keep their services.”</p> <p>The utility said it will work with customers who have past due balances, helping them to identify available assistance programs and provide options for a payment plan.</p> <p>Tens of millions of dollars remain as there are several relief funds and utility assistance programs still available, but customers must apply.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 IHME: Covid pandemic into endemic phase |
| SOURCE | https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/covid-19-pandemic-becoming-endemic/PXYCPGUCOFHKXGMD5E5NFR2EUY/ |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE — Despite a massive global effort to fight COVID-19, it's likely the virus is here to stay, but that doesn't mean the pandemic will stay with it.</p> <p>Researchers at the University of Washington say we are entering a new phase with COVID-19, one that we'll need to learn to live with.</p> <p>"I foresee that COVID-19 will become a seasonal virus and that you and I will need to take a shot before the season," says Doctor Ali Mokdad with the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington.</p> <p>"We believe the Pandemic phase of COVID-19 is gone and we are heading into an endemic phase."</p> <p>That means just like the flu season, we will have COVID-19 season.</p> <p>He also says a guidance system will need to be put into place much like for hurricanes that will help people gauge whether or not they need to take precautions like mask mandates and social distancing.</p> <p>Dr. Mokdad says the number of daily admissions to local hospitals is one of the best metrics for this, "If it is below [a certain] number we're in a good position. If it is above this number we need to regroup and put some mandates back in place."</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Data: pandemic negatively impacts learning |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/crisis-in-the-classroom/new-test-results-show-covid-negatively-impacts-learning-across-washington-state |
| GIST | <p>Results from a Fall 2021 assessment paint a picture of Washington students' biggest needs, from math to reading.</p> <p>The state superintendent and Seattle Public Schools are sharing their plan to help get students back on track.</p> <p>"It doesn't feel like a full year that they're behind but I would say maybe a few months behind, at least," Shoreline School District Parent Julie Dennis stated, remembering the challenges her now-second and fourth grade boys had with remote learning last year. "There's definitely a lag socially and educationally."</p> <p>Her family is not alone. New data was released this week from the so-called Smarter Balanced Assessment that Washington students in fourth through ninth grades, and juniors and seniors took last fall as an assessment of the previous school year.</p> <p>It states less than half of Seattle students last year met or exceeded state standards in math and it was less than 60-percent in English Language Arts and Reading. That's a drop of nearly 20-percent in math and 10 percent in ELA standards when compared to the most recent data we could find from the 2018-2019 school year.</p> <p>"We're not that surprised," said Dr. Concie Pedroza, SPS Associate Superintendent. "There was a lot of impacts from the pandemic. It is a first look at what we need to be doing for this year. It's a great time for us to say, 'OK, what's really happening? Are our strategies right on target?'"</p> <p>State Superintendent Chris Reykdal claimed students are not failing, arguing this assessment doesn't paint the whole picture of student growth in a year.</p> |

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| | <p>“There’s so much we don’t test that’s been enhanced so never use a standardized exam to determine whether or not we’re better or worse,” Reykdal said. “What it does indicate though is where we would expect our state of education to be had there not been a pandemic.”</p> <p>The state’s largest school district agrees, which is why it will be performing even more assessments to gauge the academic and emotional needs of individual students, schools and the district as a whole.</p> <p>“Each student and family get their own individual assessment and so the individual student and family get to work with their teacher and to see what kind of supports does their child need,” Pedroza said.</p> <p>“No one should expect that there’s some magic tutoring or intervention that just suddenly changes things,” Reykdal said. “This is a process.”</p> <p>KOMO asked if the state needs better measuring tools to see how Washington kids are doing and he responded parents and students should trust local educators to help get students ready for the next level. He said other ways to track student growth include attendance levels and credits to see if students are on track to move on to the next grade or graduate.</p> <p>“None of this is a permanent setback,” Reykdal said. “No one unlearned things. What they really did is probably didn’t make as much progress as historically observed. What we have to do is enforce supports for them, get mental health, school psychologists, nurses, social workers.”</p> <p>OSPI said individual student scores should be available in the coming weeks.</p> |
| Return to Top | Look up assessment results by individual districts here. |

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Study: Utah tough DUI law fewer crashes |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/business/study-fewer-crashes-after-utah-set-strictest-dui-law-in-us/ |
| GIST | <p>SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Traffic deaths decreased in Utah after the state enacted the strictest drunken driving laws in the nation five years ago, new research published Friday by a U.S. government agency shows.</p> <p>The findings, which pertain to fatalities involving and not involving alcohol, provide initial validation for conservative lawmakers who passed the law over concerns from restaurant and tourism industry lobbyists.</p> <p>In the study published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, researchers wrote that, in the years after Utah changed the drunken driving threshold from .08% to .05% blood-alcohol content, the number of crashes and fatalities fell even though drivers logged more miles.</p> <p>“Changing the law to .05% in Utah saved lives and motivated more drivers to take steps to avoid driving impaired,” said Dr. Steven Cliff, the agency’s deputy administrator.</p> <p>The findings mark a triumph for Utah’s Republican-controlled Legislature, which voted to decrease the legal limit in 2017 over concerns that it would discourage prospective new residents and tourists.</p> <p>They and other opponents argued it would be ineffective and cement Utah’s pious reputation at the expense of the growing number of visitors and residents who aren’t part of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.</p> <p>Utah, where about 60% of the population are members of the faith, has long enforced some of the nation’s strictest liquor laws.</p> <p>All spirits and wine are sold at state-run stores. Bartenders are required to use specialized spouts to ensure they pour specific amounts of liquor into mixed drinks. And beer can be sold in grocery stores only if its alcohol-by-volume content is less than 5%.</p> |

In response to the study, Jackson Shedelbower of the American Beverage Institute said the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) was presenting selective information.

“The cause-and-effect explanation from NHTSA is cherry picking data. Utah has experienced a drop in alcohol-related traffic fatalities since 2016, but so have more than thirty other states. Three other small population states enjoyed bigger declines than Utah without dropping their 0.08 (blood-alcohol content) law,” he said.

A church spokesman, Doug Anderson, declined to comment on the study but reaffirmed the faith’s position from 2017 when, following the passage of the policy, the church said the law “demonstrates Utah’s commitment to good public policy and to protecting people from the tragedies that come from drinking and driving.”

When the state lowered the threshold for impaired driving from the nation’s standard .08% blood-alcohol content, lawmakers argued it would make driving safer.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration study showed that there were fewer crashes and lower alcohol involvement both after the widely publicized law passed in 2017 and after it went into effect in 2018.

In 2019, the first full year with the law in effect, there were 225 fatal crashes and 248 fatalities in Utah. Though drivers logged more miles, that was less than the 259 fatal crashes and 281 fatalities in 2016, the year before Utah changed its law.

The change meant a 150-pound (68-kilogram) man would be over the 0.05% limit after two beers, while a 120-pound (54-kilogram) woman could exceed it after a single drink, though that can be affected by a number of factors, including how much food a person has eaten, according to the American Beverage Institute, a national restaurant group.

Crash and fatality rates also fell in neighboring states but not as significantly as they did in Utah.

Crashes per mile driven fell 19.8% from 2016 to 2019 in Utah, which was much more than the 5.6% reduction rates for the entire United States.

The drunken driving arrest rate increased after the Utah law went into effect, rising from 76 to 84 arrests per 100,000 residents between the fourth quarter of 2018 and the fourth quarter of 2019.

Additionally, survey data included in the study also suggested more people who consume alcohol changed their behavior after the law went into effect.

In 2018, 1 in 8 drinkers said they made sure transportation would be available when drinking outside the home, either by a designated driver or ride-hailing service. In 2019, more than 1 in 4 people surveyed said they made sure it would be available.

The revised blood-alcohol level law also appears not to have affected tourism. Alcohol sales and overall visitor spending increased steadily from 2009 to 2019 and didn’t experience a dip after the new law went into effect in 2018. The tourism industry struggled through the pandemic but is slowly rebounding, data from the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah show.

In response to the study, the Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety group that supported the lower limit blasted the hospitality industry for what it called “fear-inducing tactics” — including an ad campaign spearheaded by the American Beverage Institute that warned prospective Utah visitors: “Come for vacation, leave on probation.”

“The study outcomes provide a strong rebuttal to these baseless arguments made by opponents of lower BAC laws,” Cathy Chase, the group’s president, said in a statement.

The National Safety Transportation Board has since 2013 encouraged states to follow Utah's lead. Lawmakers in states including Delaware, New York, Oregon, Hawaii, California and Michigan have considered changing their laws. But apart from Utah, all states use .08% as the legal blood-alcohol limit.

"The hope is that other states will see these results and join Utah in passing legislation for .05," National Transportation Safety Board member Tom Chapman said in a statement.

Utah Rep. Norm Thurston, the Republican who sponsored the 2017 legislation, said the vocal opposition to the law provided needed publicity that may have increased the effectiveness of the law, discouraging people from drinking and driving.

He said he'd spoken to lawmakers in about 10 other states interested in passing similar policies. Changing the threshold, he said, proved "there are things that we put into public policy that will change people's behavior."

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 IRS backlog imperils 2022 tax filing season |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/02/11/irs-returns-backlog/ |
| GIST | <p>Nearly 24 million taxpayers are still waiting for the Internal Revenue Service to process their tax returns from last year — a number far larger than previously reported by the agency — with many refunds being held up for ten months or more.</p> <p>The inventory of unprocessed returns and related correspondence was provided by the IRS's taxpayer advocate service to the tax-writing committees in Congress. The backlog will probably further slow service in the 2022 filing season; the Treasury Department, the IRS's parent agency, warned in January that it expected its response to be subpar this year.</p> <p>The pileup of work that remains from last year, according to three people who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not approved to speak publicly, comes as the tax agency struggles to hire and train new staff, and respond to growing bipartisan pressure from lawmakers and tax preparers to clear the logjam and provide relief to taxpayers. Among the considerations are suspending tax collections and excusing some penalty enforcement.</p> <p>"This situation is untenable," A group of 30 Senate Republicans wrote in a Thursday letter to Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and IRS Commissioner Charles Rettig. They pointed to a raft of delayed returns, some dating back to the 2019 filing season, along with millions of missed calls and other correspondence that had threatened "our constituents' ability to have their returns processed accurately and efficiently." But some Republicans simultaneously are working to block any new federal aid that might help the agency, and the letter did not endorse any spending.</p> <p>The IRS's productivity plummeted during the coronavirus pandemic as thousands of employees worked from home for months without access to returns, audits and other business — difficulties that followed years of budget cuts. The federal stimulus measures also added to the agency's workload, as it emphasized getting relief money to millions of Americans. Paper returns took the greatest hit, as mail piled up on trucks outside closed offices for months.</p> <p>The Republican senators' letter came just days after a report from the IRS inspector general found that the agency continues to suffer from severe hiring shortages, inefficient practices and old equipment. That includes mail processing woes, since its systems have "outdated dust collectors" that cause paper jams. Poor scanners, meanwhile, meant the IRS last year missed out on \$56 million because of "untimely check deposits," since the agency could not tell if envelopes it received contained checks.</p> <p>As of Jan. 28, the tally of outstanding individual and business returns requiring what the IRS calls "manual processing" — an operation where an employee must take at least one action rather than relying on an automated system to move the case — came to 23.7 million, the taxpayer advocate data shows. The</p> |

number includes 9.7 million paper returns awaiting processing; another 4.1 million that were suspended because of errors with stimulus payments, pandemic relief or other issues; 4.1 million amended returns and 5.8 million pieces of correspondence awaiting action between the agency and taxpayers to resolve issues before the returns are completed.

In January, National Taxpayer Advocate Erin Collins had reported a backlog of at least 10 million returns based on IRS data. An IRS official, meantime, said the agency counts the inventory from last year's filing season at about 6 million paper returns for individual taxpayers. Both numbers are far higher than the unprocessed returns the IRS faced before the pandemic — in the past, the agency typically carried over 1 million or fewer returns into the next tax season.

But the new data takes into account broader categories of work that have stalled since the pandemic and some returns that have come in this year. Taxpayer advocates, lawmakers and others say the expansive count is more realistic.

"This entire ecosystem of pending cases gives the public a fuller picture of what the IRS is up against," said Chad Hooper, executive director of the nonprofit Professional Managers Association, which represents hundreds of IRS managers. "And it's a crazy number before most people have filed their taxes for this year."

The stockpile does not include audits lingering because of pandemic slowdowns, enforcement and collection actions, appeals of audits, notices of tax liens, penalties or other business in the pipeline, Hooper said.

The vast majority of taxpayers now file their tax returns electronically, and those can generally be processed quickly unless they are flagged for errors, identity theft or other issues. Roughly 10 percent — about 17 million people — still file Form 1040, the traditional individual income tax return, on paper.

The IRS is taking at least ten months to process paper returns filed for the 2020 tax year, and has only caught up to April 2021 for returns without errors, according to the most recent data on its website. Last year the vast majority of taxpayers — about 77 percent — received refunds.

Since returns are processed in the order in which they were received, "It does mean the 2022 filings made this year are at the end of the line," Hooper said.

The backlog was formed in part by the mandates placed on the IRS over the course of the roughly two-year pandemic.

Beginning in 2020, lawmakers deputized the agency to send direct pandemic relief checks to millions of Americans, adding immense pressure to act swiftly to help cash-strapped families newly out of work. Multiple stimulus packages approved rounds of such payments, and Democrats last March made an even more work-intensive request: to stand up a system that would distribute monthly tax payments to families with young children.

President Biden and top Democrats proposed boosting the IRS budget, arguing that the agency had been severely underfunded and understaffed for decades before the added responsibilities. But the effort has so far failed to gain enough support in Congress, while talks continue around a new spending deal to fund the government and prevent a looming shutdown.

Democrats and Republicans alike each express confidence they can strike a bargain that funds federal agencies through the remainder of the 2022 fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30. But GOP lawmakers repeatedly have warned Democrats about including "poison pills," offering a list of nonstarters in October that included proposed increases in funding at the IRS.

Rather than support new funding, Republicans this week called on the IRS to "consider exercising its existing authority" to ease the burden on taxpayers. That would include halting automated liens and other

collections processes, particularly until the staff can sort through piles of unopened mail, while better prioritizing the kinds of returns in its possession.

“When our constituents cannot get help from those tasked to administer our tax laws, it diminishes the integrity of our voluntary tax system,” the senators wrote in their letter.

IRS spokeswoman Jodie Reynolds referred questions on the lingering inventory to a letter Rettig sent this week to all 535 members of Congress. Rettig, an appointee of former president Trump, acknowledged an “unprecedented amount of unprocessed tax returns and correspondence remaining in the IRS inventory during 2021.”

But he said the problem has been compounded by a lack of funding to hire new staff and modernize its aging computer software systems, some of which date to the 1960s.

Rettig said he is considering penalty relief for taxpayers. “We will rapidly adapt to changing circumstances, when appropriate to do so,” he said. “We are doing everything we can with all of the resources available to us.”

The agency has already suspended mailing some automated collection notices that are triggered when records show a taxpayer owes tax and has not filed a tax return. Many of these letters have been sent after returns have been filed but have not been processed.

The commissioner announced last week that he was temporarily reassigning 1,200 employees as part of a “surge team” to help. But Collins told the oversight panel of the House Ways and Means Committee this week that the staffing problems are far broader, compounded by recruiting challenges and low pay.

The agency sought to fill 5,000 positions for several campuses across the country in time for this tax season, but was able to hire less than 200, she said. The situation is so dire that for the first time, officials are offering \$500 referral bonuses to employees if a new hire stays in the job for a year.

The agency has one of the government’s oldest workforces. Its submission processing unit — responsible for opening the mail — lost 20 percent of its staff last year to retirements, departures and transfers to other IRS departments, officials said. The Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration reported this week that as of August 2021, IRS faced a total staff shortfall in the submission processing unit of about 2,598 employees. The surge Rettig announced last week is not going to submission processing, however, but to a department known as accounts management, which is responsible for answering taxpayers’ phone calls and responding to general correspondence.

The watchdog said that although the IRS has several initiatives underway to help address its hiring shortages, “to date these approaches have not been successful.” It urged the agency to delay a planned closure of its processing center in Austin — part of a long-term consolidation as more business is done electronically — “until hiring and backlog shortages are addressed.”

“Just like many industries across the country, jobs are available, but people are not applying,” Reynolds, the IRS spokeswoman, said in an email. “In [our case,] applicants may not like the shifts or pay — many of these are lower graded positions that were below the \$15.00 minimum hourly rate.”

The backlog and looming troubles with this filing season led tax preparer groups to form a coalition in recent weeks to pressure the agency for relief.

“The service says, ‘stay patient’,” said Nina Tross, executive director of the National Society of Tax Professionals, which has joined with ten groups to form the Tax Professionals United for Taxpayer Relief Coalition, representing up to 100,000 preparers. “But there is nobody to help the taxpayer. What is it going to take to get this outstanding inventory through the system?”

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| | <p>Tross said that while some automated notices have stopped, many of her clients are still inundated with penalties saying they failed to file or failed to pay, when in fact they have or have sent letters back contesting the charges. Preparers seeking to file power of attorney forms for clients also have gotten nowhere, she said.</p> <p>“They’re sitting on somebody’s desk who cannot come into the office,” she said. “We’re hitting all of these roadblocks and it’s just not good enough.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Seattle mayor extends eviction moratorium |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-extends-eviction-moratorium-through-end-of-february/ |
| GIST | <p>Seattle’s eviction moratorium, which for the past nearly two years has prevented evictions of residential renters, small businesses and nonprofits, will be extended through the end of February and then expire, Mayor Bruce Harrell announced Friday.</p> <p>There will be no more renewals, Harrell said.</p> <p>It is at least the seventh time the moratorium, first enacted in March 2020, has been extended, as the coronavirus pandemic has waxed, waned, surged and lingered, causing both sickness and death but also lost incomes and economic uncertainty.</p> <p>“With COVID cases steadily declining, the time has come for the city to move on from the broad approach of the eviction moratoria and instead drive more deliberate and focused efforts to support those most in need,” Harrell said in a prepared statement.</p> <p>Harrell directed the city’s Office of Housing to distribute \$25 million to renters and small landlords, as a complement to the larger amount of rental assistance being distributed by King County.</p> <p>About 124,000 households — more than 12% of all renters — in the Seattle metro area, which includes King, Pierce and Snohomish counties, are behind on rent, according to a census survey from the first weeks of January.</p> <p>King County has been working, slowly, to distribute millions of dollars of federal rental assistance to thousands of applicants seeking help. As of last month, the county had spent about \$149 million and processed about 27,000 households’ applications.</p> <p>But thousands more applications remain unprocessed and the county has asked for \$120 million more in federal funds, saying the need for rental assistance is far greater than the funds available.</p> <p>The county recently received an additional \$66.5 million from the state.</p> <p>“This additional funding will help serve thousands more applicants, but unfortunately, we still will not be able to serve all pre-registered households,” said Chase Gallagher, a spokesperson for County Executive Dow Constantine. “There are an additional 10,943 applications that have pre-registered and have not been assigned to a provider. If more funds become available, we will seek to distribute those funds accordingly.”</p> <p>Even if more money does become available, housing advocates are concerned that once evictions begin, some people could lose their homes while they wait in line for their rental assistance to be processed.</p> <p>“There’s still this really big gap between the need for rental assistance and what’s been made available,” said Katie Wilson, general secretary of the Seattle Transit Riders Union. “If the moratorium ends, we’re going to have a wave of evictions as landlords are trying to get rid of tenants who are behind on rent.”</p> <p>Other levels of protection are in place for renters once the moratorium expires.</p> |

In 2020, the Seattle City Council unanimously approved a bill to give tenants a defense against rent-related evictions for [six months after the moratorium ends](#). And both [the city](#) and [the state](#) have passed legislation mandating free attorneys for people facing eviction. Seattle also [doesn't allow winter evictions](#) by large landlords.

But those measures do not prevent the eviction process from starting, and they depend on tenants actually showing up in court to defend themselves.

“That’s something that can be a big barrier,” Wilson said.

Seattle also has a suite of [new laws](#) that have gone into effect since the moratorium began that, while they don’t directly stop evictions, intend to ease life for renters in one of the country’s most expensive housing markets.

Landlords are now required to give six months’ notice for any rent increase and they also must pay relocation assistance to certain tenants if they raise rents by 10% or more and the tenant moves out.

Edmund Witter, managing attorney for the Housing Justice Project, said he worried about tenants being able to access their court dates, with some court proceedings still taking place online.

“If you go to the King County Superior Court website for evictions and try to log in, it’s not easy, it’s certainly not intuitive, especially for foreign-language speakers,” Witter said. “You’re going to have people lose their case because they don’t know how to use Zoom or they don’t know how to log in.”

Olivia Mansker-Stoker, a tenant counselor with the anti-poverty organization Solid Ground, deals regularly with people outside Seattle, where moratoriums are no longer in effect, who are now facing eviction.

Burien, Mansker-Stoker noted, recently [extended its moratorium](#) through the end of the state’s declared public health emergency, whenever that may be.

“Seattle needs to do the same,” Mansker-Stoker said. “Two weeks is not enough time for renters.”

Landlord representatives say the moratorium’s expiration is long overdue, and that the moratorium had prevented them from dealing with problem tenants.

“The No. 1 thing is about behavior, it’s not even about rent,” said Sean Flynn, executive director of the Rental Housing Association of Washington. Flynn says he hears from landlords who are unable to address or evict tenants who they suspect of selling drugs or harassing their neighbors.

“You’ve got people sort of just behaving unneighborly and sometimes violently and sometimes criminally and the order has really tied the hands of landlords to enforce lease terms that are behaviorally oriented,” Flynn said.

Brett Waller, director of government affairs for the Washington Multi-Family Housing Association, said other jurisdictions have not seen a wave of evictions when their moratoriums expired.

The last iteration of Washington’s statewide eviction moratorium [expired Oct. 31](#).

“There really is nowhere that evictions have even trended to the level that evictions were filed or occurred prior to the pandemic,” Waller said. “We haven’t seen that in Washington state and we definitely won’t see that in Seattle.”

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| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/business/amazon-shapes-life-for-teens-some-high-school-activists-are-working-on-giving-it-up/ |
| GIST | <p>Lily Clark, Tessa Han and Jason Zhao — and many of their classmates at suburban Seattle high schools — have been trying to avoid Amazon.</p> <p>But that can be hard in high school. For teens growing up in and around Seattle, and living through a pandemic, life barely works without Amazon.</p> <p>Without a credit card of their own or an easy way to get to a store, just signing on to Amazon Marketplace is the easy way to shop. And, with so many friends and relatives already employed at the tech giant, writing off a career there doesn't always feel like an option.</p> <p>But after a tornado tore through Edwardsville, Illinois, in December, resulting in the deaths of six workers at an Amazon warehouse, Clark, Han and Zhao were moved to try to hold Amazon accountable in its own backyard.</p> <p>"We were always aware of what Amazon was like and all that," said Harry Gollin, a senior at Mercer Island High School who helped organize a demonstration set for Saturday morning at Denny Park, near Amazon's Seattle headquarters.</p> <p>"You hear these stories about people getting hurt on the job and that's awful, but this idea that six people were left to die, forced to be put in a dangerous situation," Gollin said. "It makes you wonder about something that you take for granted, that's so inconspicuous and you wonder what actually goes into making it happen."</p> <p>Outside of Edwardsville, Amazon has come under scrutiny for its treatment of workers in its fulfillment centers, including allegations it pressures employees to fill orders quickly and work at speeds that could exacerbate injuries. Washington's Department of Labor and Industries cited the company twice for safety violations at its DuPont, Pierce County, distribution center.</p> <p>Amazon says its injury rate has decreased recently. The recordable incident rate, which measures how often an injury or illness occurs at work, improved 24% from 2019 to 2020. The lost time incident rate, a measure of how often an injury or illness results in time off the job, improved 43%.</p> <p>But Amazon's injury rate was still higher than the average for warehouses in the U.S., according to a company report from January. The industry average was 5.5 injuries for every 200,000 working hours. Amazon's rate was 6.4.</p> <p>"We wanted to organize the protest to remind them that their workers are not disposable," Zhao, a senior at Mercer Island High School, said.</p> <p>"I see this as an opportunity — because this is something that is so tangible — it's at least an opportunity to try to begin this process of bringing attention to Amazon," said Clark, also a senior at Mercer Island.</p> <p>The student protest, scheduled for 10 a.m. Saturday, is being organized by clubs at Mercer Island, Woodinville and Bellevue high schools. Over two months, students spent hours sending late-night emails to labor unions (and crossing their fingers for a response), and kicking off classes with a pitch to fellow classmates to get involved.</p> <p>Aside from some members of the entrepreneurial club, Zhao said it has been well-received, with classmates offering to come up with slogans and make signs to help the effort.</p> <p>In some ways, it was easier than planning a party, Zhao said. Having a common purpose and unified message helped get classmates on board.</p> |

On a well-off island where many residents work in the tech industry, the student organizers said the working conditions at Amazon warehouses don't come up often in the classroom. It can be hard to "balance" the fact that Amazon also employs their parents or their friends' parents.

"In our community, I think we're very focused on the administrative and executive side of Amazon ... I think we never really have the opportunity to think about the workers who are really the backbone of the company," said Kelly Cotter, also a senior at Mercer Island High School. "And making sure that they're also being highlighted and are a big part of when we think about Amazon, we also think about the workers who are working 12-hour days."

The students aren't pushing for supporters to avoid Amazon entirely — they're not sure that's possible. From the microphones they use to take Zoom calls to their history books, they find themselves on the digital marketplace at times.

"It's just so easy — where else am I going to find these items at such a low price with two-day delivery?" said Han, a student at Woodinville High School. But, she also asks herself, "Do I need another jacket? Is that worth someone's health?"

"The answer's no," she said.

The students have three demands: provide compensation for families of the victims in Illinois, provide better working conditions at Amazon, and improve safety and emergency response procedures.

Amazon has been accused of failing to warn employees of dangerous weather or provide safe shelter before the tornado hit the facility. The family of Austin McEwen, a 26-year-old delivery driver who died after the tornado hit the warehouse, [filed](#) a wrongful-death lawsuit in January. The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration has opened an investigation.

Amazon has said the lawsuit misstates the facts and has pledged to focus on supporting employees and the families who lost loved ones and the surrounding communities.

"The storms across the Midwest were a tragic natural disaster and we're continuing to work directly with our employees and partners in Edwardsville, the families who lost loved ones, and the surrounding community," Amazon spokesperson Barbara Agrait said by email. "It sounds like this [student] group may not have an accurate picture of what it's actually like to work inside our fulfillment centers, and we welcome them to come see for themselves."

Amazon has [offered public tours of its centers since May 2014](#), Agrait added.

Saturday's protest will feature an open mic for students to voice their opinions as well as speeches from local politicians and labor organizations. The students also invited workers from Amazon's DuPont warehouse, about 50 miles from Mercer Island.

The protest organizers are focused on pushing Amazon to change how it treats its workers — in DuPont, Edwardsville and elsewhere — and want to see other students take up the mantle, for many different causes.

"The hope is that this can be a springboard to demonstrate if you are a student at Mercer Island High School, or Woodinville or Bellevue High School, if you're a student period, there is a network you can reach out to," said Gollin, one of the student organizers from Mercer Island.

"In many ways being a high schooler, it feels like you can't do very much. You're trapped. You have a routine. You have all these expectations placed on you," Gollin said. "They can put their voices out there."

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| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/king-county-voters-approve-billions-in-school-levy-dollars/ |
| GIST | <p>King County voters have approved nearly all of the school levies and one bond measure on the ballot in February's special election.</p> <p>The renewal levies and bond measure that passed will bring in billions of dollars from property taxes for educational programs, and to hire staff and do building maintenance. Although election results won't be certified until Feb. 18, Friday's count showed a clear picture of final results. The last ballots to be counted will be those with signature issues that need to be resolved.</p> <p>Seattle Public Schools' \$646.8 million education programs and operations levy and its \$783 million building, technology and academic/athletics capital Levy both received about 79% approval. Levies need 50% plus one vote to pass, and bond measures need a minimum of 60% approval to pass. Levy renewals also passed in Bellevue, Lake Washington, Federal Way, Shoreline, Mercer Island, Northshore, Riverview and Renton. Northshore was the only district in King County with a bond measure on the ballot, and as of Friday it had 61% approval. The bond is for \$425 million.</p> <p>The only levies failing in King County were both measures put on the ballot by the Fife School District. But the numbers are close — it would take eight “yes” votes for the district's capital projects technology levy to pass and less than 30 for the education programs and operational levy to pass.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Pierce Co. reports first child killed by Covid |
| SOURCE | https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article258299508.html |
| GIST | <p>A Lakewood girl under the age of 10 with underlying health conditions died of the coronavirus Jan. 30, the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department said Friday.</p> <p>She was the first person in Pierce County under the age of 18 to die of COVID-19. “This sad news of this young girl's death reminds us that we need to use all the best public health practices to protect each other from COVID-19,” TPCHD Director Dr. Anthony Chen said in a news release. “COVID-19 will continue to be with us for some time. Making healthy choices and getting vaccinated are the best ways to help our community recover.”</p> <p>The health department said children are typically less at risk from COVID-19 than older people, but they do sometimes get seriously ill or die. Children ages 5-11 are the least-vaccinated group of people eligible to be vaccinated in Pierce County. According to the release, 19 percent of children in this age group are fully vaccinated.</p> <p>Children age 5 and older are eligible to get vaccinated, and the health department advised everyone over age 12 to get booster shots. COVID-19 vaccination information can be found on TPCHD's website.</p> <p>In Pierce County, the health department said people who have not been vaccinated for COVID-19 are three times more likely to be infected by the virus, 10 times more likely to be hospitalized and nine times more likely to die.</p> |
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Cyber Awareness

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| HEADLINE | 02/14 Marketing firm exposes data 7M users |
| SOURCE | https://www.hackread.com/us-marketing-firm-data-exposed-database-mess-up/ |
| GIST | The IT security researchers at Website Planet discovered what they dubbed as a ‘large data breach,’ impacting a US-based marketing automation firm, Beetle Eye . |

As per Website Planet's blog post, an estimated seven million people were affected by the data exposure. This included their names, emails, phone numbers, and addresses.

A majority of Beetle Eye's customers were American nationals, but many customers were Canadian. Presumably, the exposed databases were part of leads that Beetle Eye customers used for digital marketing purposes.

In a [blog post](#), researchers stated that a misconfigured Amazon Web Services' S3 bucket was responsible for exposing over 6k files or 1 GB worth of data. The bucket was left without any password protection and encryption.

According to researchers, around ten different folders were discovered in Beetle Eye's exposed bucket, and each file in these folders contained data of at least one client.

There were three different datasets on the bucket, namely, Colorado.com leads, GoldenIsles.com leads, and Unnamed leads. Reportedly, the exposed data sets contained different kinds of personally identifiable information (PII).

For instance, Unnamed leads included full names (first name and surname) of the lead, current/previous addresses, current/previous ZIP codes, and current/previous cities.

GoldenIsles.com leads files contained more PII, such as full names, addresses, email IDs, phone numbers, company names, data collection-related details, and survey responses.

Colorado.com leads files contained full names, addresses, email IDs, and survey answers and questions about Colorado.com magazine subscriptions.

It is yet unclear whether the database was [accessed by a third party with malicious intent](#) such as ransomware gangs or threat actors. But in case it did, it would be devastating for Beetle Eye as it exposes customers and employees to the risk of online scams, phishing campaigns, and malware infection.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Europe biggest car dealer hit in attack |
| SOURCE | https://www.zdnet.com/article/europes-biggest-car-dealer-hit-with-ransomware-attack/?&web_view=true |
| GIST | <p>One of Europe's biggest car dealers, Emil Frey, was hit with a ransomware attack last month, according to a statement from the company.</p> <p>The Swiss company showed up on the list of victims for the Hive ransomware on February 1 and confirmed that they were attacked in January.</p> <p>"We have restored and restarted our commercial activity already days after the incident on January 11, 2022," a spokesperson said, declining to answer more questions about whether customer information was accessed.</p> <p>The company -- which has about 3,000 employees -- generated \$3.29 billion in sales in 2020 thanks to a variety of automobile-related businesses. It was ranked as the number 1 car dealership in Europe based on revenue and the total number of vehicles for sale.</p> <p>The FBI spotlighted the Hive ransomware group in August 2021 after their members attacked dozens of healthcare organizations last year.</p> <p>In 2021, Hive attacked at least 28 healthcare organizations, including Memorial Health System, which was hit with a ransomware attack on August 15.</p> <p>The FBI alert explains how the ransomware corrupts systems and backups before directing victims to a link to the group's "sales department" that can be accessed through a TOR browser. The link brings</p> |

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| | <p>victims to a live chat with the people behind the attack, but the FBI noted that some victims have even been called by the attackers demanding ransoms.</p> <p>Most victims face a payment deadline ranging between two and six days, but others were able to extend their deadlines through negotiation.</p> <p>On Wednesday, the FBI, National Security Agency (NSA) and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the UK's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), and the Australian Cyber Security Centre (ACSC) released a warning indicating that a growing wave of increasingly sophisticated ransomware attacks poses a threat to critical infrastructure and organizations around the world.</p> <p>"We live at a time when every government, every business, every person must focus on the threat of ransomware and take action to mitigate the risk of becoming a victim," said CISA Director Jen Easterly.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/14 War? Cyber's fuzzy rules of engagement |
| SOURCE | https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-joe-biden-technology-business-hacking-5eadc06062f8c7acfc7b7302ec4c4478 |
| GIST | <p>BOSTON (AP) — President Joe Biden couldn't have been more blunt about the risks of cyberattacks spinning out of control. "If we end up in a war, a real shooting war with a major power, it's going to be as a consequence of a cyber breach of great consequence." he told his intelligence brain trust in July.</p> <p>Now tensions are soaring over Ukraine with Western officials warning about the danger of Russia launching damaging cyberattacks against Ukraine's NATO allies. While no one is suggesting that could lead to a full-blown war between nuclear-armed rivals, the risk of escalation is serious.</p> <p>The danger is in the uncertainty about what crosses a digital red line. Cyberattacks, including those that cripple critical infrastructure with ransomware, have been on the rise for years and often go unpunished. It's unclear how grave a malicious cyber operation by a state actor would have to be to cross the threshold to an act of war.</p> <p>"The rules are fuzzy," said Max Smeets, director of the European Cyber Conflict Research Initiative. "It's not clear what is allowed, what isn't allowed."</p> <p>The United States and other NATO members have threatened crippling sanctions against Russia if it sends troops into Ukraine. Less clear is whether such sanctions, whose secondary effects could also hurt Europe, would be imposed if Russia were to seriously damage Ukrainian critical infrastructure — power, telecommunications, finance, railways — with cyberattacks in lieu of invading.</p> <p>And if the West were to respond harshly to Russian aggression, Moscow could retaliate against NATO nations in cyberspace with an intensity and on a scale previously unseen. A major cyberattack on U.S. targets would almost certainly unleash a muscular response. But what of lesser cyberattacks? Or if Russian President Vladimir Putin restricted them to a NATO member in Europe?</p> <p>Under Article 5 of the organization's treaty, an attack on any of its 30 members is considered an attack on all. But unclear is what it would take to unleash full-scale cyber retaliation. Or how bad an attack would have to be to trigger retaliation from NATO's most potent cyber military forces, led by the U.S. and Britain.</p> <p>Cyberspace is exceptionally unruly. No arms control treaties exist to put guard rails on state-backed hacking, which is often shielded by plausible deniability as it's often difficult to quickly attribute cyberattacks and intelligence-gathering intrusions. The technology is cheap and criminals can act as proxies, further muddying attribution. Freelancers and hacktivists compound the problem.</p> |

[In 2015, the major powers and others agreed on a set of 11 voluntary norms](#) of international cyber behavior at the United Nations. But they are routinely ignored. Russia helped craft them only to knock Ukraine's power grid offline that winter and set in motion its hack-and-leak operation to interfere in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Hacking is now a core component of great power conflict. In 2016, NATO formally designated cyberspace a "domain" of conflict, alongside land, sea and air.

Nowhere has the militarization of cyberspace been more clear than in Putin's bid to return Ukraine to Moscow's orbit.

To Serhii Demediuk, the No. 2 official on Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, a noisy cyberattack last month was "part of a full-scale Russian operation directed at destabilizing the situation in Ukraine, aimed at exploding our Euro-Atlantic integration and seizing power."

The attack damaged servers at the State Emergency Service and at the Motor Transport Insurance Bureau with a malicious "wiper" cloaked as ransomware. The damage proved minimal, but a message posted simultaneously on dozens of defaced government websites said: "Be afraid and expect the worst."

Such attacks are apt to continue as Putin tries to "degrade" and "delegitimize" trust in Ukrainian institutions, the cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike [said in a blog](#) on Russian military cyber wreckage in the former Soviet republic: Winter attacks on the power grid in 2015 and 2016 were followed by NotPetya, which exacted more than \$10 billion in damage globally.

Michele Markoff, the U.S. State Department's deputy coordinator for cyber issues, thinks "muscular diplomacy" is the only way to end such "immoral, unethical and destabilizing behavior."

But how? Unlike nuclear arms, cyberweapons can't easily be quantified, verified and limited in treaties. Nor are violators apt to be held accountable in the United Nations, not with Russia and China wielding veto power on its Security Council.

"We've wallowed kind of in a quagmire for years now on making transgressors accountable," said Duncan Hollis, a Temple Law professor and former State Department legal adviser.

Members [endorsed in May an update to the 2015 U.N. norm](#) s that [further delineates](#) what should be out of bounds: including hospitals, energy, water and sanitation, education and financial services. [That has hardly deterred Russian-speaking ransomware crooks](#), who are at the very least tolerated by the Kremlin. Nor have U.S. indictments of Russian and Chinese state hackers and [the blacklisting of tech companies accused of aiding them](#) helped much.

Under [a new policy NATO adopted last year after U.S lobbying](#), an accumulation of lower-level cyberattacks — far below, say, blacking out the U.S. East Coast — could be enough to trigger Article 5. But NATO is vague on what a tipping point might be.

NATO's doctrinal shift followed a pair of seismic cyberespionage shocks — the highly targeted 2020 SolarWinds supply chain hack by Russia that badly rattled Washington and the reckless March 2021 Microsoft Exchange hack attributed to Chinese state security that set off a criminal hacking free-for-all.

A cluster of wholesale data pilfering in the mid-2010s attributed to China — from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, United Airlines, Marriott hotels and the health insurer Anthem — inflicted a deep national security wound. And U.S. officials have worried for more than a decade about rivals — Russia especially — [quietly "pre-positioning" enough malware](#) in U.S. [critical infrastructure including the energy sector](#) to cause considerable chaos in [an armed conflict](#).

In response, U.S. Cyber Command [developed a strategy](#) in 2018 it calls “persistent engagement” to counter rivals who “operate continuously below the threshold of armed conflict to weaken institutions and gain strategic advantages.”

The aim: deny foes the chance to breach U.S. systems by operating “across the interconnected battlespace, globally, as close as possible to adversaries,” Cybercom commander Gen. Paul [Nakasone wrote](#).

That has sometimes meant penetrating not just adversaries’ networks but also those of allies — without asking permission, said Smeets, the European cyber conflict analyst.

Disinformation campaigns have also muddied the definition of a “cyber threat.” No longer do they merely encompass malware like NotPetya or the the Stuxnet virus that wrecked Iranian nuclear centrifuges, an operation widely attributed to the U.S. and Israel and discovered in 2010.

During the 2018 U.S. midterm elections, Cybercom temporarily knocked offline a key Russian disinformation mill.

Most major powers have the equivalent of a U.S. Cyber Command for both offense and defense. Also active are terrorists, criminals working as state proxies, [begrudged freelancers](#) and hacktivists like the [Cyber Partisans of Belarus](#).

Hollis compares the current messy cyber moment to the early 19th century when U.S. and European navies were so small they often relied on privateers — we know them now as pirates— for high-seas dirty work.

The U.S. and other NATO partners are, meantime, helping Ukraine stand up a separate cyber military unit, said Demediuk, the Ukrainian security official. Since Russia seized Crimea in 2014, NATO has closely and systematically coordinating cyber actions with Ukraine, including joint missions, he said.

In November, Ukraine exposed an eight-year espionage operation by agents of Russia’s FSB in Crimea involving more than 5,000 attempted hacks. The main goal: to gain control over critical infrastructure, including power plants, heating and water supply systems, [Ukraine’s state news agency said](#).

This month, [Microsoft said](#) the operation, dubbed Armageddon, persists with attempts to penetrate Ukraine’s military, judiciary and law enforcement. Microsoft detected no damage, but that doesn’t mean Russian cyber operators haven’t gained undetected footholds.

That’s where hackers hide until they are ready to pounce.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Study: npm accounts expired domain |
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| SOURCE | https://therecord.media/thousands-of-npm-accounts-use-email-addresses-with-expired-domains/ |
| GIST | <p>An academic research project found that thousands of JavaScript developers are using an email address with an expired domain for their npm accounts, leaving their projects exposed to easy hijacks.</p> <p>The study, performed last year by researchers from Microsoft and North Carolina State University, analyzed the metadata of 1,630,101 libraries uploaded on Node Package Manager (npm), the de-facto repository for JavaScript libraries and the largest package repository on the internet.</p> <p>2,818 developers exposed to account hijacks</p> <p>Researchers said they found that 2,818 project maintainers were still using an email address for their accounts that had an expired domain, some of which they found on sale on sites like GoDaddy.</p> <p>The team argued that attackers could buy these domains, re-register the maintainer’s address on their own email servers, and then reset the maintainer’s account password and take over his npm packages.</p> |

An attack like this would work because the npm portal does not enforce two-factor authentication (2FA) for account owners, meaning that once the attacker reset the owner's password, they would be free to alter packages with any other hindrance.

In total, the research team said the 2,818 maintainer accounts managed 8,494 packages, which had an average of 2.43 direct dependents, denoting that any attack would also hit tens of thousands of other downstream projects.

Account hijacks like these could be spotted by the account owners, but researchers also pointed out that many npm libraries and accounts are either unmaintained (58.7%) or abandoned (44.3%), and there would be a big chance that attackers would be able to carry out their attacks without the maintainers even noticing.

npm team appears to have reacted to the findings

The research team said they notified the npm security team of their report's findings but did not say how the npm team reacted. An email sent to GitHub, which owns npm, was not returned before this article's publication.

However, it is worth noting that days before this study was published in December 2021, npm [announced plans](#) to slowly start enforcing 2FA for developer accounts. This process was scheduled to take place in multiple stages, with the Top 100 maintainer accounts being enrolled in mandatory 2FA [at the start of this month](#).

Additional details on the study are available in the "[What are Weak Links in the npm Supply Chain?](#)" research paper. Some of the research team's other findings are also listed below:

- 2.2% (33,249) of packages used install scripts, which could be abused to run malicious commands and is against npm best security practices;
- The Top 1% packages (14,941) had an average of 32.4 maintainers per package, opening the door for attacks via the accounts of inactive or inattentive developers;
- 389 packages had 40 contributors for every maintainer, opening the door for the accidental insertion of security flaws or flooding a project with contributions to sneak in malicious code;
- The top 1% maintainers own an average number of 180.3 packages with direct dependents of 4,010 average packages, meaning some developers could be overworked or not have time to thoroughly maintain or review package changes.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 ModifiedElephant undetected nearly 10yrs |
| SOURCE | https://www.scmagazine.com/news/cloud/modifiedelephant-an-indian-apt-group-targeting-dissidents-operated-undetected-for-nearly-10-years |
| GIST | <p>Researchers on Wednesday discovered an advanced persistent threat group that targeted Indian dissidents and remained undetected for a decade or more, starting with simple phishing lures some 10 years ago and then graduating to providing links to files hosted externally in the cloud for manual download and execution by the victims.</p> <p>In a blog post, SentinelLabs researchers reported on ModifiedElephant, which has been operating since at least 2012. The researchers said the threat group operates through the use of commercially available remote access trojans and has ties to the commercial surveillance industry.</p> <p>The threat actor uses spearphishing with malicious documents to deliver malware such as NetWire, DarkComet, and simple keyloggers with infrastructure overlaps that helped the researchers connect the dots to previously unattributed malicious activity.</p> <p>ModifiedElephant's activities have been traced to long-standing political tensions in India, which exploded on Jan. 1, 2018, when critics of the government clashed with pro-government supporters near Bhima Koregaon. Later in 2018, raids conducted by police led to several arrests and the seizure of computer</p> |

systems, which revealed incriminating files that pointed to an alleged plot against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Thanks to the public release of digital forensic investigation results by Arsenal Consulting and those detailed in SentinelLabs blog, the researchers allege that ModifiedElephant compromised the computers that were later seized, planting files that were used as evidence to justify the imprisonment of the defendants. Over a decade or more, the group targeted human rights activists, human rights defenders, academics, and lawyers across India with the objective of planting incriminating digital evidence — and they are still operating today.

The case has become part of a larger trend of private and commercial company's copying government and nation-state methodologies, persistently looking to penetrate into politically involved individuals, said Gadi Naveh, cyber data scientist at Canonic. Naveh said although most of the tools described aren't top grade, continuous fueling of the attack eventually gets the target and larger funding gets even better tools, as was implied by Amnesty International.

"We assume these tools and methods that move from nation-states to commercial organizations will keep answering the demand and available funds for getting data," Naveh said. "The move of data to the cloud makes the top-tier actor act there, but as with RATs and keyloggers, we are seeing the same military-grade tools moving after the new data sources in the cloud."

Daniel Almendros, cyber threat intelligence analyst at Digital Shadows, added that he and his team view ModifiedElephant as a fascinating, albeit dangerous actor. Almendros said ModifiedElephant has a wide range of tools in its arsenal that it uses to target a large number of victims. They use a blend of off-the-shelf tools (NetWire and DarkComet RATs), paired with spearphishing emails related to the sensitive 2018 Bhima Koregaon affair.

"The phishing lures have improved in subtlety as well as boldness, they have shifted from fake double extension file names to commonly used Office filenames," Almendros said. "In one instance, an assassination attempt story was added to provoke the user to click on the phishing lure. These emails were distributed to many different users. The group likely has a connection with Indian state espionage. Because most APT attention stems from China and Russia-based threats, ModifiedElephant was initially overlooked for years. In addition, the group's specific targeting and use of commodity malware helped the group evade detection for a prolonged period."

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 CISA: HiveNightmare Windows vulnerability |
| SOURCE | https://www.securityweek.com/cisa-says-hivenightmare-windows-vulnerability-exploited-attacks |
| GIST | <p>The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has added 16 new CVE identifiers to its list of known exploited vulnerabilities, including a Windows flaw that federal agencies are required to patch within two weeks.</p> <p>A majority of the 15 flaws added by CISA to its "Known Exploited Vulnerabilities Catalog" on Thursday are old — they were disclosed in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2020. They impact Windows, Jenkins, Apache Struts and ActiveMQ, Oracle's WebLogic, Microsoft Office, D-Link routers, and Apple's OS X operating system.</p> <p>The 16th vulnerability, a WebKit zero-day patched by Apple this week in iOS and macOS, was added to the list on Friday.</p> <p>The most recent vulnerability of the ones added on Thursday is CVE-2021-36934, a Windows local privilege escalation vulnerability that Microsoft patched in August 2021. The tech giant initially released workarounds and mitigations in July 2021, when the issue was disclosed.</p> |

The flaw, named HiveNightmare and SeriousSam, can allow a local user with low privileges to achieve SYSTEM privileges. Cybersecurity experts warned at the time of disclosure that the vulnerability could pose a serious risk due to the fact that it's easy to exploit.

[Technical details](#) and [proof-of-concept \(PoC\) exploits](#) for the vulnerability were made public even before Microsoft released patches.

There do not appear to be any recent public reports about active exploitation of CVE-2021-36934. However, CISA recently confirmed for SecurityWeek that it's aware of real world attacks for each flaw included in the catalog, even if in some cases there do not appear to be any public reports of malicious exploitation. The agency said it does not publicly provide details about exploitation.

Microsoft confirms that details of the vulnerability are public and assigns it an "exploitation more likely" exploitability rating, but the company's advisory (last updated in August 2021) currently says it's not aware of attacks. Microsoft told *SecurityWeek* on Friday that it has nothing to share beyond its [advisory](#) and [additional guidance](#).

It's possible that CISA added CVE-2021-36934 to the list of known exploited vulnerabilities based on information from a blog post published by SentinelOne in early August 2021. The endpoint security firm noted at the time that it had seen [several malware samples](#) uploaded to the VirusTotal scanning service that had incorporated the available HiveNightmare exploits. SentinelOne said the vulnerability could help attackers simplify the process of exfiltrating credentials.

SecurityWeek has reached out to SentinelOne to find out if CISA's warning might be related to its older blog post and if it has actually seen those malware samples being used in the wild. However, the company was not able to share any information on Friday.

When CISA [launched the list of known exploited vulnerabilities](#), it also announced Binding Operational Directive (BOD) 22-01, which requires federal civilian agencies to identify and address known exploited vulnerabilities within defined timeframes — newer flaws need to be patched within two weeks while older issues must be fixed within six months.

As instructed by the BOD, HiveNightmare will need to be patched until February 24, while the other flaws will need to be fixed by August 10.

As for CVE-2022-22620, the WebKit vulnerability that CISA added to its list on Friday, Apple says it has been exploited, but it has not shared any information about the attacks. CISA has given federal agencies until February 25 to patch the flaw.

While the BOD only applies to federal civilian agencies, CISA "strongly urges" all organizations to prioritize the vulnerabilities in its "must patch" list to reduce exposure to attacks.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 DDoS attacks jump during late 2021 |
| SOURCE | https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/ddos-attacks-jumped-by-52-in-q4-2021 |
| GIST | <p>Nearly half of all distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks in the fourth quarter of 2021 hit organizations in the US during an extremely active period for the disruptive attacks, new data shows.</p> <p>Kaspersky reported tracking 4.5 times more DDoS attacks in the fourth quarter than in the previous quarter, with attacks targeting victims in the US (43.55%), China (9.96%), Hong Kong (8.80%), Germany (4.85%), and France (3.75%). The security vendor attributed the massive spike in DDoS attacks to seasonal trends, such as online holiday shopping and cyber activists traditionally being more active October through December.</p> <p>The "sharp drop" in cryptocurrency value in the fourth quarter also was a factor: "This is because DDoS and mining capacities are partially interchangeable, so botnet owners tend to deploy them in mining when</p> |

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| | cryptocurrency prices are high and in DDoS when they fall. We witnessed precisely that in Q4, and not for the first time: a rise in the number of DDoS attacks amid a sharp drop in the value of cryptocurrencies," Kaspersky security expert Alexander Gutnikov wrote in a blog post on the DDoS attacks . |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 CISA: federal agencies update iPhones |
| SOURCE | https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/cisa-orders-federal-agencies-to-update-iphones-macs-until-feb-25th/?&web_view=true |
| GIST | <p>The US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) has added a new flaw to its catalog of vulnerabilities exploited in the wild, an Apple WebKit remote code execution bug used to target iPhones, iPads, and Macs.</p> <p>According to the binding operational directive (BOD 22-01) issued by CISA in November, federal agencies are now required to patch their systems against this actively exploited vulnerability impacting iOS, iPadOS, and macOS devices.</p> <p>CISA said that all Federal Civilian Executive Branch Agencies (FCEB) agencies have to patch the vulnerability tracked as CVE-2022-22620 [1, 2] until February 25th, 2022.</p> <p>"These types of vulnerabilities are a frequent attack vector for malicious cyber actors of all types and pose significant risk to the federal enterprise," the cybersecurity agency said.</p> <p>"Although BOD 22-01 only applies to FCEB agencies, CISA strongly urges all organizations to reduce their exposure to cyberattacks by prioritizing timely remediation of Catalog vulnerabilities as part of their vulnerability management practice."</p> <p>Yesterday, CISA also asked FCEB agencies to patch 15 other vulnerabilities tagged as being under active exploitation, with CVE-2021-36934 — a Microsoft Windows SAM (Security Accounts Manager) bug allowing privilege escalation and credential theft — having a February 24th patch deadline.</p> <p>Third zero-day patched by Apple this year</p> <p>The CVE-2022-22620 is the third zero-day Apple has patched since the start of 2022 and is a WebKit Use After Free issue exploitable for OS crashes and code execution on vulnerable devices.</p> <p>Successful exploitation enables attackers to execute arbitrary code on iPhones, iPads, and Macs after opening maliciously crafted web pages using Safari.</p> <p>"In particular, all browsers for iOS and iPadOS are based on this open source engine — that is, not only iPhone's default Safari, but also Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox and any others," Kaspersky said today. "So even if you do not use Safari, this vulnerability still affects you directly."</p> <p>"Apple is aware of a report that this issue may have been actively exploited," the company added when describing the zero-day.</p> <p>Apple has addressed the vulnerability with improved memory management in iOS 15.3.1, iPadOS 15.3.1, and macOS Monterey 12.2.1.</p> <p>The complete list of impacted devices is quite extensive, and it includes iPhone 6s and later, multiple iPad models, and Macs running macOS Monterey.</p> <p>Even though this flaw was likely only used in a small number of targeted attacks, it's still highly recommended to install the updates as soon as possible to block potential attack attempts, just as CISA urged earlier today.</p> |

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| | In January, Apple also patched two other actively exploited zero-days that can let attackers track browsing activity and users' identities in real-time (CVE-2022-22594) and gain arbitrary code execution with kernel privileges (CVE-2022-22587). |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 FBI: WA 6th in nation for SIM-swapping |
| SOURCE | https://mynorthwest.com/3346424/sim-card-swap-scam-washington/ |
| GIST | <p>There is another kind of scam out there that targets your information — by getting the information off your phone’s SIM card. And unfortunately, according to stats from the FBI’s Seattle Division, Washington is the sixth-highest state in the nation for reports of SIM-swapping.</p> <p>SIM cards are the little cards in the backs of our cell phones that we all likely forget about unless we take the backs of our phones off. They may be tiny, but the cards hold a treasure trove of data.</p> <p>“There’s a lot of information on your SIM card itself, ... such as your text messages, all of the mobile data that’s going back and forth for the service provider, ... a lot of your contact information, a lot of your passwords,” said L.T. Chu, senior supervisory intelligence analyst for the FBI Seattle Division. “A lot of information could be stored on a very, very small chip.”</p> <p>Once criminals have that data, they can steal your identity and get into your accounts.</p> <p>Criminals get access to people’s SIM cards by hacking cell phone companies — through phishing emails, for example — and stealing customers’ information.</p> <p>If your SIM card has been compromised, you will notice some clues, Chu said. Very quickly, your phone will stop functioning properly; you will not be able to get on the internet or make calls. If that happens, contact your cell phone company to see if there is a problem they can explain. If there is not, then report the crime to your local FBI field office and ic3.gov. Change your passwords, and contact your bank to let them know your accounts have been compromised.</p> <p>The good news is that there are ways you can make sure that if someone does hack your phone service provider, you will not be as much of a target because your information is not out there.</p> <p>“If you’re getting cold-called for information such as passwords or PINs from someone claiming to be a mobile service provider, certainly don’t give that information out,” Chu said.</p> <p>If that happens, hang up immediately and call your cell phone company.</p> <p>“Most mobile service providers, if not all, will never ask for that information without a reason,” Chu said. “So they won’t cold-call you; you would have to call them.”</p> <p>Never post personal data online, such as phone numbers, addresses, or information about buying cryptocurrency. Also, be careful of “fun” quizzes on social media that ask you for seemingly harmless personal information such as the name of your first pet or the first concert you attended; these kinds of questions can also serve as security questions for accessing bank accounts.</p> <p>Use biometric multifactor authentication for your accounts if possible, such as a fingerprint or face scan. Text message authentication can be used by a criminal who gets access to your phone, but something attached to you cannot be replicated.</p> <p>Do not use the same password for each site. It can be hard to remember many different passwords, so Chu suggests using a password bank.</p> <p>“It may sound counterintuitive, where if that one password account or bank is compromised, then all your accounts are compromised,” Chu said. “But if you use strong multifactor authentication, ... it’s a lot better than using the same weak passwords for multiple accounts.”</p> |

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Bitcoin theft 'heist of the century'? |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/law/2022/feb/14/us-bitcoin-case-cybercrime |
| GIST | <p>The prosecution of a New York husband and wife arrested last week on suspicion of stealing \$3.6bn in bitcoin in what has been described as “the heist of the century” may test US authorities’ ability to crack down on cybercrime.</p> <p>It may also test the bounds of believability as more and more colorful – and downright bizarre – details emerge of the couple at the heart of the saga which seems to lie at an unlikely nexus between the cryptocurrency, rap, self-help advice and New York eccentricity.</p> <p>The couple targeted in the sting, Ilya “Dutch” Lichtenstein and Heather Morgan, a self-described “badass money maker”, were charged with conspiracy to commit money laundering and conspiracy to defraud the United States. They are currently on \$5m and \$3m bail, respectively, but held in custody after a judge in Washington granted an emergency request by the government to keep them detained.</p> <p>But prosecutors are not trying to tie them to the actual theft from a Hong Kong cryptocurrency exchange in 2016. Instead, the case unveiled by the Department of Justice on Tuesday alleges that the couple used a complicated web of transactions to transfer about 25,000 of the 119,754 bitcoin stolen by hackers. The couple’s lawyer, Samson Enzer, argued in a court filing on Wednesday there are “significant holes in the government’s case against them”.</p> <p>But according to Money Laundering News, the case may be the first time the government has brought a case not on the basis of an alleged theft, but on the couple’s alleged efforts to conceal their identity from virtual currency financial institutions with obligations under the Bank Secrecy Act (BSA) to report transactions to regulators.</p> <p>At the time of the heist, the coins were valued at \$71m but are now worth about about \$4.5bn – to various virtual currency exchangers.</p> <p>According to the government’s Statement of Facts, the stolen bitcoin was “layered” and “chain-hopped” through a series of virtual wallets to the “darknet market AlphaBay” and then back, and finally on to accounts where it was converted into fiat currency, gift cards and precious metals and withdrawn as cash from bitcoin ATMs.</p> <p>What may be more fascinating is that the couple at the center of what US prosecutors have described as the largest financial seizure in the history of the Department of Justice were able to utilize so little of the stolen cryptocurrency.</p> <p>Authorities said more than 80% of the stolen currency remained untouched in accounts associated with the couple and money laundering allegations against them identify only small sums, including the purchase of a \$500 Walmart gift card and gift cards for Uber, Hotels.com and PlayStation.</p> <p>Indeed the entire lifestyle of the pair hardly matches what one might imagine criminals whose alleged theft has such an astonishingly high value.</p> <p>Their Manhattan apartment was rented and cluttered with cat toys and exercise equipment. They walked their Bengal cat named Clarissa on a leash. The pair had a huge social media and internet presence with many hours of video and other postings. In one, unearthed by Vice, Lichtenstein apparently was filmed eating cat food.</p> <p>Morgan presented herself variously as “the Crocodile of Wall Street”, “Razzlekhan”, a surrealist artist and rapper with “more pizzazz than Genghis Khan”, as well as the “Turkish Martha Stewart” and the “Waffle Queen of Korea”. She wrote on her website that she was always pushing the limits.</p> |

“Whether that leads to something wonderful or terrible is unclear; the only thing that’s certain is it won’t be boring or mediocre,” she said.

In that respect she was not wrong.

In a column for Forbes magazine that reeks with cheeky hindsight she wrote about “Experts Share Tips To Protect Your Business From Cybercriminals” accompanied by an author biography that puffed “when she’s not reverse-engineering black markets to think of better ways to combat fraud and cyber crime, she enjoys rapping and designing streetwear fashion”.

She posted singles and videos on YouTube, including a 2019 song, Versace Bedouin – described as an “anthem for misfits and weirdos” – while dressed in a gold lamé jacket in front of a statue of George Washington in New York’s financial district. She gave a talk at the Williamsburg hotel in Brooklyn titled “How to Social Engineer Your Way Into Anything”.

Her husband disclosed in a [Facebook post](#) that he’s planned his marriage proposal around “a weird, creative multi-channel marketing campaign” that featured posters and digital ads that “captured the essence of Razzlekhan: surreal, mysterious, creepy and sexy”.

But their downfall may have come because bitcoin is more easily traced on blockchain – a financial ledger – than other cryptocurrencies and because they simply had too much of it.

“It [would be] mindbogglingly stupid to steal this much bitcoin,” Frank Weert, the co-founder of Whale Alert, a blockchain tracking and analytics company, [told the Financial Times](#). “If they had stolen 500 bitcoin, no one would have bothered trying to find them, but this was the heist of the century.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 San Francisco 49ers hit by ransomware |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/ransomware-gang-says-it-has-hacked-49ers-football-team |
| GIST | <p>RICHMOND, Va. (AP) — The San Francisco 49ers have been hit by a ransomware attack, with cyber criminals claiming they stole some of the football team's financial data.</p> <p>The ransomware gang BlackByte recently posted some of the purportedly stolen team documents on a dark web site in a file marked "2020 Invoices." The gang did not make any of its ransom demands public or specify how much data it had stolen or encrypted.</p> <p>The team, which is among the most valuable and storied franchises in the NFL and lost a close playoff game two week ago, said in a statement Sunday that it recently became aware of a "network security incident" that had disrupted some of its corporate IT network systems. The 49ers said they'd notified law enforcement and hired cybersecurity firms to assist.</p> <p><i>"To date, we have no indication that this incident involves systems outside of our corporate network, such as those connected to Levi's Stadium operations or ticket holders," the team said in a statement, referencing its home stadium.</i></p> <p>News of the attack comes two days after the FBI and U.S. Secret Service issued an alert on BlackByte ransomware, saying it had "compromised multiple US and foreign businesses, including entities in at least three US critical infrastructure sectors" since November.</p> <p>Ransomware gangs, which hack targets and hold their data hostage through encryption, have caused widespread havoc in the last year with high-profile attacks on the world's largest meat-packing company, the biggest U.S. fuel pipeline and other targets. Western governments have pledged to crack down on the cyber criminals, who operate largely in and around Russia, but have little to show for their efforts.</p> <p>In the past month, ransomware victims have included operators of maritime fuel depots in Belgium and Germany and media outlets in Portugal. A cyberattack on the wireless provider Vodafone in Portugal this</p> |

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| | <p>past week had all the hallmarks of ransomware, though the company's CEO for Portugal said it received no ransomware demand.</p> <p>BlackByte is a ransomware-as-a-service group. That means it's decentralized, with independent operators developing the malware, hacking into organizations or filling other roles. It's part of a trend of ransomware groups becoming increasingly professionalized. A recent report by the FBI, NSA and others said that ransomware operators are even setting up an arbitration system to resolve payment disputes among themselves.</p> <p>Brett Callow, a threat analyst at the cybersecurity firm Emisoft, said BlackByte's malware, like many ransomware variants, is hardcoded to not encrypt systems that use Russian or languages used by certain Russian allies.</p> <p>But Callow said that doesn't mean whoever is behind the 49ers attack is in Russia or one of its neighbors. "Anyone can use the malware to launch attacks," he said.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Olympic star draws heat w/social media use |
| SOURCE | https://www.sfgate.com/olympics/article/SF-Olympian-Eileen-Gu-draws-heat-16913287.php |
| GIST | <p>Beijing Olympics gold medalist Eileen Gu is under fire from some fans after posting a possibly illegal way to avoid internet censorship in China.</p> <p>Gu, 18, was born in San Francisco but has chosen to compete for her mother's native China as a freestyle skier. Gu grew up in the tony Sea Cliff neighborhood and took ski lessons in Tahoe, initially competing as an American athlete before petitioning for a change of nation in 2019. It is not clear if she has renounced her U.S. citizenship — China does not recognize dual citizens — and Gu has declined to comment on the subject.</p> <p>Since arriving in China, Gu has posted on social media, which drew the attention of many fans in China. Sites and apps such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Google search and Wikipedia are blocked as part of China's Great Firewall, an attempt by the government to censor and control the flow of information.</p> <p>"Why can you use Instagram and millions of Chinese people from mainland cannot," an Instagram user commented on one of her posts. "... That's not fair, can you speak up for those millions of Chinese who don't have internet freedom."</p> <p>Gu responded, "Anyone can download a vpn its literally free on the App Store" with a thumbs-up emoji. A virtual private network can be utilized to mask a user's location, allowing people to get around firewalls.</p> <p>This advice was not well received by her legion of fans, many of whom pointed out that downloading an unauthorized VPN is illegal in China. Others said Gu may be receiving preferential treatment that ordinary citizens don't benefit from. In 2017, a University of Washington student was arrested and detained for months after using a VPN to log into a school system to submit homework.</p> <p>Gu, who reportedly will attend Stanford University in the fall, has been careful to avoid any discussion of geopolitical issues. After winning the gold medal in big air Tuesday, Gu told the media about how she handles backlash.</p> <p>"No matter what I say, if people don't have a good heart, they won't believe me because they can't empathize with people who do have a good heart," Gu said. "So in that sense, I feel as though it's a lot easier to block out the hate now. And also, they're never going to know what it feels like to win an Olympic gold medal."</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Updating Covid vaccine status on WA Verify |
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| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/boosted-heres-how-to-update-your-wa-verify-qr-code-to-prove-your-covid-vaccine-status/ |
| GIST | <p>More than 1 million Washington residents have used the WA Verify vaccine system, which enables smartphone users to receive a unique QR code they can scan at events or certain businesses to prove they are vaccinated against COVID-19.</p> <p>The state Department of Health teamed up with Microsoft and the state of California to roll out the tool for residents in fall 2021.</p> <p>The QR code is pulled from the state's immunization system, which means those who got vaccinated by the Department of Veterans Affairs, other federal agencies or out of state will likely not be able to locate their COVID vaccine record.</p> <p>If you have received a booster shot, you will need to get an updated QR code, which can be done by registering at waverify.doh.wa.gov, just like first-time users.</p> <p>You will need to enter your name, date of birth, and an email or phone number that might be associated with your record. If your information matches the state's immunization records, you will receive a text or email with a link to your digital COVID-19 vaccine verification record.</p> <p>The record shows the date and make of each dose received, including booster shots.</p> <p>You can save the QR code to your phone and use it on SMART Health Card readers to confirm your vaccination status.</p> <p>COVID cases continue to decline across Washington, and hospitalizations at the state level appear to have plateaued after declining.</p> <p>There were 1,820 COVID patients hospitalized statewide as of Friday. In the last two weeks, this figure has stayed in the 1,700 to 1,900 range.</p> <p>In the Inland Northwest, cases have also declined, although rates are still higher than the peak of any previous wave, state data shows.</p> <p>As of Monday, 80.2% of the state population 5 and older has received at least one dose of a vaccine. Health officials recommend a booster dose for everyone who is 12 and older and fully vaccinated. Boosters are recommended five months after your second dose of a Pfizer or Moderna vaccine and two months after the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.</p> <p>There have been 1,241 deaths due to COVID-19 in Spokane County.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 FBI: online romance scams Valentine's Day |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/11/experts-warn-online-romance-scams-valentines-day/ |
| GIST | <p>Fans of Netflix's "Tinder Swindler" may know how romance scams work online, but the experts warn that many of America's loneliest hearts could still fall for fraud on Valentine's Day.</p> <p>The FBI says the scammers typically adopt a fake identity with someone else's photos on social media apps or dating websites, build trust with flattery of lonely singles — especially seniors — and then steal their financial information or hit them up for requests for money, gifts and bogus investments.</p> <p>"When starting a relationship online, proceed carefully and be aware of warning signs like requests for money or personal and financial information," the FBI said Thursday in a statement emailed to The Washington Times.</p> |

In 2021, 24,000 victims of Cupid scammers reported to law enforcement that they lost about \$1 billion in hoaxes. That's up from the \$281 million that victims reported losing in 2020, according to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center.

Since romance scams are "intensely personal," the FBI said, many victims do not report them because they may feel embarrassed.

Therese Schachner, a cybersecurity consultant for the St. Louis-based internet safety resource VPNBrains, said it's important not to click on photos from a suspicious Lothario because they could be phishing links that install malware to harvest private information from a victim's device.

"Scammers may also send phishing links that allegedly lead to online dating sites' registration pages, encouraging users to sign up for these sites to find their match for Valentine's Day," Ms. Schachner said. "However, these links may request users' personal information and send it to scammers once users submit this information, putting them at risk of identity theft and other malicious uses of their data."

Ms. Schachner said one big warning sign of romance scams, which often come from hackers in foreign countries who look nothing like the photos in their profiles, is "frequent excuses to avoid video calls or in-person meetups."

By that point, she said, many scammers have already pre-selected and studied their victims online in a carefully targeted exercise of "social engineering."

"Scammers often research victims' social media profiles and other online information about them to discover what might motivate them to click on certain links or reveal private information," Ms. Schachner said.

Mayank Gupta, co-founder and CEO of the GetDispute.com website that helps romance scam victims file their complaints in small claims court, said victims can also turn the tables on their scammers by researching the predators.

"The more information you have about the name and address of a defendant, the higher your likelihood is going to be of success in any legal proceeding," Mr. Gupta said. "If you know the true identity of the person that scammed you, that is going to go a long way in helping you recover your losses, if a judge does rule in your favor."

Most scammers never face criminal charges, he said, leaving victims to try to recover their money through the small claims system.

"It's unfortunate that scammers prey on anyone, but especially in these vulnerable, innocent situations, where the victim is simply looking for a relationship, to build a friendship and possibly more," Mr. Gupta said. "You're emotionally vulnerable and scammers know it. It's all the more reason to be alert."

As of Friday, the Better Business Bureau's Online Scam Tracker showed that 33 romance scams have been reported in the U.S. since Jan. 1. The most recent report came on Tuesday.

In a 2018 study on romance scams, the BBB found that they run longer and cause greater personal harm than ordinary financial hustles.

"They prey on lonely people looking to connect with someone, and can often take months to develop to the point where money changes hands," the BBB said in the report. "The emotional harm to the victim can be even more painful than the monetary loss."

Often the victims invest so much emotionally in the illusion of a stranger being attracted to them that they choose the perception over reality. But many Cupid scammers exploit several victims at the same time, shattering any fantasy of exclusivity.

Netflix's "Tinder Swindler" docudrama tells the story of Shimon Hayut, a convicted fraudster born in Israel who used dating apps to establish lines of credit and loans in the names of multiple women. Those women then received the bills for his lavish lifestyle without realizing he was bilking several of them.

And "Dirty John," a viral true-crime podcast series produced by Wordery and the Los Angeles Times, shows the twisted depths to which manipulative romance scams go — including murder.

But experts say Cupid schemes are easily avoided if the people stay wary about strangers they meet online.

According to the FBI, other warning signs of romance scams include: immediate attempts to communicate by email or messaging outside of a dating site, claims to be a U.S. citizen living abroad, comments about "destiny" or "fate," requests to help with sudden financial crises, name changes and requests for money or goods without meeting in person.

The FBI said potential victims can best defend themselves by never sending money electronically, revealing credit or banking information, or giving their social security numbers to people they meet online. They can also limit what they share, ask lots of questions and research the person's profile online.

While the schemes affect victims from all demographics, the FBI reports that elderly women are often targeted the most.

In addition to reporting romance scams to law enforcement, the agency said victims should also contact their banks about any suspicious transactions and warn the social media app or website where they encountered the person.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Investigators: state licensing data accessed |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/business/investigators-thieves-got-access-to-data-from-650000-individuals-in-state-licensing-database/ |
| GIST | <p>Investigators now believe that hackers stole Social Security numbers and other sensitive personal data from at least some of the 650,000 current and former Washington state professionals and business owners whose information was held on a breached state database, Department of Licensing officials confirmed Friday.</p> <p>The breach, which was detected Jan. 24 and disclosed last week, affected personal data in active, expired, revoked or suspended licenses for 23 of the 39 professions and businesses that require state licensing. Vulnerable data included Social Security numbers, driver's license numbers and dates of birth. Data from the department's driver's license system wasn't affected, agency officials said.</p> <p>"Based on our investigation, [Department of Licensing] has sufficient reason to believe the Professional and Business Licensing System was accessed and records were acquired without authorization," the agency said in an updated statement on its website.</p> <p>Investigators, who now include the FBI, the Washington State Patrol and the state attorney general's office, still haven't determined whether the breach occurred within the agency, in the database or in some other part of the data system, said agency spokesperson Nathan Olson.</p> <p>The database is maintained by San Francisco software company Salesforce, which has said it has no evidence that the breach occurred due to a problem in the database.</p> <p>The Department of Licensing is notifying individuals who may be affected by the breach and will provide them with a year of credit monitoring and identity theft protection.</p> |

The agency's main online licensing portal, known as Polaris, has been shut down since Jan. 24 as a security precaution, but the agency is offering [limited renewal services](#) for businesses and professionals with expiring licenses.

Agency officials had initially said that the breach might have exposed the data of around 257,000 individuals with active licenses in the system, but acknowledged that the full number was likely larger.

Friday's estimate grew to 650,000 because it included individuals with inactive licenses, and also because a single business license can include information for multiple people, Olson said.

Friday's announcement confirms what many outsiders already suspected: that personal information in the agency's data system wasn't merely exposed during the breach, but in at least some cases was removed and may be on the "dark web," an anonymized section of the World Wide Web accessed through special software. Stolen personal data is often traded there for use in illicit activities such as the mass impostor fraud that [struck Washington's unemployment system in 2020](#).

As early as late January, some individuals with business licenses in Washington said they had received notifications that some of their personal information had been detected on Jan. 24 on the dark web. That was the date that the state's Office of Cybersecurity became aware of the breach after detecting "chatter" on the dark web about "accessed" personal data from Department of Licensing.

Although investigators are certain some personal data was stolen, they still haven't determined how, where and when the breach occurred, Olson said.

State Sen. Reuven Carlyle, D-Seattle, who has received agency briefings on the incident, said investigators are looking at the entirety of the Department of Licensing's data "ecosystem."

That includes the agency's own internal data systems, the state's broader information technology infrastructure, and the third-party firms that run the database and the integration of the database with the agency, said Carlyle, a technology executive and consultant.

Cybersecurity investigations often focus on the "handoff of data" between different parts of the data ecosystem, Carlyle said. "There is often a particular vulnerability in the cybersecurity category when there's a transition or handoff of data between various parties — and how data goes through that journey is obviously important."

On Monday, a Salesforce spokesperson said that, "at this time, we have no evidence of a vulnerability inherent to the Salesforce platform." Salesforce did not respond to a request for an update Friday.

The consulting firm Deloitte configured the Salesforce platform to work with the Department of Licensing system, Olson said.

Also unclear is whether the breach occurred on Jan. 24 or if that was simply when the state Office of Cybersecurity became aware of the breach.

Breaches are often conducted over a long period, and criminals may not sell the data immediately, said Tari Schreider, a strategic adviser in the cybersecurity practice at Aite Group, a financial services consultancy.

"Once the hackers get in there, they basically lie in wait and look for data that may be interesting," Schreider said. "Hackers could have been in there for months."

Investigators may look at whether the data was in a secure, encrypted form while being stored, moved or processed, said Schreider, who is not involved in the investigation.

Olson said the investigation, which also includes the state Office of Cybersecurity and a third-party cybersecurity firm, CrowdStrike, was “still investigating whether data was unencrypted.”

Data encryption is no guarantee against breaches, said Special Agent Kevin Brennan, who is currently supervising the cyber task force at the FBI’s Seattle field office.

Although unencrypted data can be easier for hackers to use or monetize, hackers who manage to break into a system and steal encrypted data often also steal the encryption key that lets them unlock the data, Brennan said.

(Per agency policy, Brennan would neither confirm nor deny his office’s involvement in the Department of Licensing investigation, and said his comments referred to data security generally and not to the Department of Licensing breach.)

Cybercriminals typically use Social Security numbers and other personally identifiable information for “follow-on” crimes, including obtaining credit cards and bank loans, Brennan said.

They also use the data in so-called account takeovers. Thieves “find an existing account that belongs to you and convince [banks] that I’m you because I have your name and your address, date of birth, your social,” said Brennan.

On Friday, some professionals and business owners said they had already received their notifications from the Department of Licensing. Others were still waiting to learn if they were among the at-risk categories — or were wondering whether this breach would be any more or less damaging than any of other numerous breaches that have happened recently.

“All these reputable companies have had these data breaches,” said Shonta Riles, a notary and owner of Poppin Notary in Tacoma, referring to a spate of recent reports. As a result, he said, the personal information for “most of the people in the United States is probably [already] on the dark web, to be honest with you.”

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Terror Conditions

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Afghan diplomats potentially stateless |
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| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/13/us/politics/afghan-embassy-diplomats-taliban.html |
| GIST | <p>WASHINGTON — Already reeling from a Taliban takeover of their government and a humanitarian disaster in their homeland, Afghan diplomats in the United States are grappling with another bleak reality: the loss of pay and the possibility of being deported.</p> <p>Several dozen diplomats assigned to Afghanistan’s embassy in Washington and consulates in New York and Los Angeles have not been paid since October, officials said, when American banks froze accounts to prevent the Taliban from gaining access to the embassy’s funds.</p> <p>But the envoys, who were part of the American-backed government that was overthrown in August, are keeping the embassy open — continuing diplomatic work but also preserving the diplomatic status that allows them to remain in the United States.</p> <p>Should the embassy close before they are granted asylum or other legal residency, the diplomats could find themselves stateless and without the permits needed to get a job.</p> <p>“This is not something that we wanted. But it is something that came,” Abdul Hadi Nejrabi, the Afghan Embassy’s deputy chief of mission, said in an interview.</p> |

“We may not be able to continue for a long time — it will come to an end,” he said. “There is still a lot of work to do. But we are here until we reach a path we can’t continue.”

Around the world, Afghan diplomats continue to carry out their duties independent of the leadership in Kabul. Many have criticized the new government as “[illegitimate](#)” and still fly the internationally accepted flag of Afghanistan over their embassies instead of the Taliban’s banner. Others have lobbied their host nations against unconditionally recognizing the Taliban’s authority.

Yet the situation is taking a toll on diplomats who are also still coming to grips with representing an elected government that has ceased to exist. Mr. Nejrabi said they were living largely on savings, or on loans from relatives. Some have no health insurance and are racking up thousands of dollars in medical bills. In France, diplomats have moved into the embassy compound to avoid paying rent on private apartments, according to two former Afghan diplomats.

For now, the mission continues at the Afghan Embassy in Washington, a stately brick Colonial Revival building in the capital’s diplomatic quarter. Mr. Nejrabi said the Afghan staff was processing documents and other consular requests, and otherwise helping settle Afghans who have fled to the United States to escape the Taliban.

The services bring in \$2,000 to \$3,000 in fees each month, Mr. Nejrabi said — enough to keep the lights and other utilities on, but too little to pay salaries. That has left the diplomats and their families — about 65 people in all — scrambling to make ends meet.

They are not alone: Public workers across Afghanistan have also not been paid as [Washington issues conflicting guidance](#) over whether American sanctions should be enforced against Afghan government bank accounts that are now, in theory, controlled by the Taliban. The freezing of assets of the Afghan Central Bank has precipitated a liquidity crisis that has exposed [eight million people](#) to possible starvation in a country torn by war, drought and acute poverty.

The sanctions were imposed against the Taliban years ago, when it was [designated as a global terrorist organization](#). In October, after the group seized power, Citibank froze the Washington embassy’s accounts and withheld what Mr. Nejrabi said was hundreds of thousands of dollars designated for salaries that the former Afghan government had deposited months before it was ousted.

U.S. officials have tried, unsuccessfully, to assure Citibank that it would not be penalized if the Afghan funds were unlocked. The bank’s spokesman, Rob Runyan, declined to comment.

“Our priority all along has been to figure out a way to facilitate a soft landing for the Afghan diplomats who are in the United States,” said Mark Evans, the State Department’s director for Afghanistan affairs. “Obviously, they’re in very difficult circumstances through no fault of their own, and we wanted to be as supportive as possible.”

Still, the Biden administration has refused to recognize the Taliban as a legitimate government. Until that happens — if it ever does — officials said the State Department would not accredit any diplomats the group sends to Washington.

While the Afghan government owns the embassy building in Washington, the State Department is responsible for maintaining the property if its envoys are unable to do so. Control of Afghanistan’s diplomatic missions remains at the forefront of the struggle for power between the Taliban and their opponents over international recognition and support.

One Afghan diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid repercussions, said he detected slow-motion efforts by the Taliban’s government to gain recognition from other countries and control of Afghanistan’s diplomatic missions. Most nations will be guided by what the U.S. government does, he said.

Last month, the State Department noted the embassy's dire financial situation in a memo to Afghan diplomats that advised what would happen to the staff if the building had to shut down. Several officials, who described the document on the condition of anonymity, said it extended diplomatic immunity and residency to the Afghans for 30 days, to give them time to pursue asylum or other legal status that would allow them to remain in the United States.

Mr. Nejrabi said around 55 Afghan diplomats and their family members in the United States were seeking asylum, joining more than 100,000 Afghan applicants in a process that has overwhelmed the Biden administration since Kabul fell in August. The rest are expected to apply to have their diplomatic status converted to permanent residency through a different process that, officials said, can accept only 50 cases each year.

Matthew Bourke, a spokesman for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, said 31 Afghans had so far applied to change their status to permanent residency. That number includes diplomats and their family members, Mr. Bourke said, in a process that can take several months to complete. In the meantime, the immigration agency has waived application fees for the financially strained Afghan diplomats and offered to allow temporary work permits while their cases are pending.

But without asylum or other legal permits, remaining in the United States is far from assured for the diplomats, although it is not expected that they would be sent back to Afghanistan, where they could be in danger for working for the previous government.

Afghan diplomats around the world, led by a group of senior ambassadors in Western capitals, refused to join a conference call scheduled by the new foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, late last year. Most still have not spoken with him.

"Everyone refused and said: 'I do not want to talk to a government that came by force. We do not represent you,'" Mr. Nejrabi said.

He added, "Even if the U.S. had a new relationship with the Taliban, and they asked me to stay, I would not, because I cannot betray my people."

Mr. Nejrabi, 38, was appointed to the prestigious post of the Afghan Embassy's second in command in Washington in 2019, after diplomatic stints in Dubai and as the vice chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce in Kabul. Now he is hoping for a job in the United States — if he receives legal residency — that will make use of his skills.

"Our diplomats were educated and grew up with freedoms," he said. "So how can we go back?"

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Declassified Afghanistan evacuation report |
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| SOURCE | https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/02/12/afghanistan-evacuation-after-action-reports/ |
| GIST | <p>Declassified U.S. military analyses of the calamitous exit from Afghanistan detail repeated instances of friction between American troops and diplomats before and during the evacuation, concluding that indecisiveness among Biden administration officials and initial reluctance to shutter the embassy in Kabul sowed chaos and put the overall mission at "increased risk."</p> <p>Two "after action" reports were prepared by officials assigned to U.S. Central Command in September, about three weeks after the final planeload of military personnel departed Hamid Karzai International Airport. The assessments appear to affirm separate accounts of senior U.S. commanders frustrated by what they characterized as sloppy, misguided management of the withdrawal.</p> <p>As The Washington Post first reported Tuesday, military leaders who coordinated the evacuation fault officials in the White House and the State Department whom, they say, failed to respect the Taliban's swift advance last year and resisted pleas from the military to prepare for an evacuation weeks before Kabul's fall.</p> |

The declassified after-action analyses are contained within an official report detailing the military's investigation of an Aug. 26 suicide bombing outside the airport's Abbey Gate that killed an estimated 170 Afghans and 13 U.S. service members. The report, obtained by The Washington Post through a Freedom of Information Act request, comprises dozens of witness interviews, findings of fact, and other official government records. Spanning 2,000 pages, it presents the most extensive, unvarnished account to date of the United States' 17-day race to end its longest war.

The existence of [the after-action reports](#) contradicts claims made Friday by White House press secretary Jen Psaki, who has joined President Biden and other administration officials in seeking to downplay the significance of U.S. commanders' remarks.

"I think it's important for people to understand that there was no after-action report," Psaki told reporters in the White House briefing room.

A National Security Council official — who, like some other officials, spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue — said Saturday that Psaki's statement from the podium referred to a forthcoming, more extensive review of the war's endgame.

"Many people have wrongly conflated the Abbey Gate report and documents released to The Washington Post with the Pentagon's after-action review of Afghanistan — a broad report that will examine the final months of America's longest war, beginning in February 2020," the official said, referencing the month that President Donald Trump made a deal with the Taliban, setting the stage for a withdrawal of all U.S. troops.

The Biden administration has pointed to that deal — in which Trump agreed to pull all U.S. troops by May 2021 — in explaining part of its rationale for leaving Afghanistan. After a months-long review, the Biden delayed the final exit until September but followed through nonetheless, saying that Americans had sacrificed enough.

The NSC official said the White House stands by the findings of the Abbey Gate investigation. It concluded that the Aug. 26 attack was carried out by a lone Islamic State operative who had a bomb rigged with ball bearings to cause catastrophic carnage in a packed outdoor corridor just outside the airport. Senior military officials [briefed those conclusions](#) at the Pentagon on Feb. 4.

Biden administration officials have offered shifting responses to the critical firsthand accounts of senior military commanders and other U.S. troops involved the evacuation effort.

President Biden said in an interview with NBC News on Thursday that he was "rejecting" the commanders' accounts, though White House officials said later that he accepted the narrow, overall findings of the Abbey Gate report. On Tuesday, State Department spokeswoman Jalina Porter described the comments of the military officials as having been "cherry-picked" from the larger report. A State Department official said Saturday that he could not comment on the Defense Department's after-action analyses.

The after-action reviews included in the Abbey Gate report were completed by U.S. Forces-Afghanistan Forward, the military headquarters that oversaw the withdrawal, and Joint Task Force-Crisis Response, a unit led by the U.S. Marine Corps that also was involved. Their findings closely hew to observations made by Rear Adm. Peter Vasely and Brig. Gen. Farrell Sullivan, who were responsible for coordinating the evacuation.

The after-action report by U.S. Forces-Afghanistan Forward, which Vasely oversaw, is dated Sept. 24 and titled "Operation Allies Refuge," the name the Biden administration assigned to the evacuation mission. It determined that decisions to delay reducing the size of the U.S. Embassy's staff in Kabul and declare a formal evacuation of American citizens and Afghan allies complicated the military's ability to execute its mission.

An Aug. 10 interagency tabletop exercise to rehearse the evacuation “identified the deteriorating situation which predicted the full isolation of Kabul within the next 30 days,” but no decision to evacuate was made then, according to the report. Instead, a day later embassy staff informally requested military support to gradually downsize and shift operations to the airport “over a 17 day period,” the report said.

In their witness statements to Army officials investigating the airport bombing, Vasely and other officers described the delayed evacuation as fateful.

U.S. troops would have been “much better prepared to conduct a more orderly” evacuation, [Vasely told the investigators](#), “if policymakers had paid attention to the indicators of what was happening on the ground.”

On Saturday, National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson said that claims that the NSC slowed the evacuation is “wrong.”

“Our planning for the noncombatant evacuation operation began in April — a fact supported by these documents,” she said.

Military officials also said in interviews that planning for the evacuation began in April, as Biden made his decision to withdraw all U.S. troops. But efforts by commanders, including Sullivan, to begin preparing more fully for the evacuation in July were met with resistance, he said.

The worsening situation in Kabul prompted Secretary of State Antony Blinken and White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan to call the acting ambassador, Ross Wilson, on Aug. 12 and tell him he needed to speed up the process, Vasely told investigators.

Watson said that a claim by the Marine general in his interview with Army investigators that an NSC official said during an Aug. 6 meeting that if they needed to carry out an evacuation operation, “we have failed” is inaccurate. But another administration official from the Pentagon did say it, a second NSC official said.

“General Sullivan mistook someone in a meeting for being an NSC official, and then points to this official’s comments as evidence of his conclusions” that the NSC did not have a sense of urgency, Watson said.

The evacuation order was declared after the central government in Kabul collapsed on Aug. 15 as the Taliban completed a months-long rise, seizing numerous provincial capitals and eventually encircling Kabul, where a skeleton force of about 600 U.S. troops remained to provide security for the diplomats. The crisis triggered the deployment of more than 5,000 additional U.S. troops, some of whom had been staged in the region. Over the next two weeks, more than 124,000 people were flown to safety.

The after-action report prepared by Vasely’s headquarters says the decision to delay closing the embassy left commanders about 12 hours to empty out the embassy with State Department collaboration. It recommends that future crisis planning “should include a discussion on building consensus” while readying an evacuation operation “with triggers for action that should be taken to avoid strategic surprise.”

The report also states that U.S. troops struggled in the bombing’s aftermath. There was a “severe failure” in patient administration and tracking, the report says, including one instance when a set of human remains and a patient in critical care were misidentified, resulting in the wrong name being reported to more senior commanders.

“The discrepancy was discovered prior to [family] notification,” the report says.

The second after-action analysis included in the Abbey Gate report focuses heavily on the actions of U.S. Marines at the airport. It concludes that after Afghanistan’s government collapsed, there was “insufficient airlift” in the region needed to rapidly boost the number of U.S. forces at the airport.

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| | <p>“While considered in the planning phase, the scope and scale of the desperation population was not fully appreciated,” the report states, referring to the tens of thousands of civilians who converged on Kabul’s airport seeking a way out of Afghanistan.</p> <p>The State Department at times sent messages to potential evacuees that “conflicted with gate conditions and realtime capabilities” at the airfield, military officials wrote in the second after-action report. It warns that the Defense and State departments must have personnel at all levels “plan, cooperate and endeavor to stick to the plan” to successfully carry out future evacuations.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 US envoy: Taliban behind unjust detentions |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/12/taliban-have-detained-29-women-and-their-families-in-kabul-says-us-envoy |
| GIST | <p>The Taliban have detained 29 women and their families in Kabul, a senior US diplomat said on Saturday, adding to concerns about rising numbers of people seized and held indefinitely in Afghanistan.</p> <p>Rina Amiri, US special envoy for Afghan Women, Girls and Human Rights, said that women were among 40 people seized on Friday. “These unjust detentions must stop,” she said in a tweet.</p> <p>It has since been deleted, but other sources confirmed that multiple women had been detained in Kabul. The state department did not respond to requests for comment on why it was removed.</p> <p>Earlier on Friday, the Taliban released a group of journalists including two foreigners, after news of their detention caused an international outcry. They also freed an activist who had disappeared after a women’s rights protest, amid mounting diplomatic pressure including from the UN secretary general.</p> <p>“I am increasingly concerned about the wellbeing of missing women activists in Afghanistan. Several have ‘disappeared’, some not heard from in weeks,” António Guterres had said on Twitter on Thursday. “I strongly urge the Taliban to ensure their safety so that they can return home.”</p> <p>But other female activists, some of who were abducted from their homes in the middle of the night, have not been set free. The Taliban police and the interior ministry denied any role in their arrests.</p> <p>Rights groups denounced the disappearances as a campaign of intimidation, after the Taliban brought in oppressive rules including barring girls from secondary education, and women from most work outside the health and education sectors.</p> <p>“Every disappearance highlights one of the huge gaps in Afghanistan today, the lack of rule of law,” said Heather Barr, associate women’s rights director at Human Rights Watch.</p> <p>“This is not how you act when you are trying to be a government, and it highlights the callousness with which they seem to think they can just abduct women and sloppily deny it.”</p> <p>There are also concerns about Alia Azizi, a senior prison official who has been missing for more than four months after reporting for work. Several women who worked for the security forces under the previous government have been attacked and killed since the Taliban came to power.</p> <p>“While we welcome the release of Parwana, these families and others, including Alia, are still detained,” Amiri said in her tweet.</p> <p>None of those held have been charged with any crime, or able to contact lawyers or speak to their families.</p> <p>The British government has also raised concerns about citizens who have been held for several months.</p> |

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| | <p>The family of cameraman-turned-businessman Peter Jouvenal have gone public with their concerns about his health since he was seized in December.</p> <p>He is married to an Afghan citizen and was in Kabul for work and to settle family affairs. Friends are concerned about his health and safety; he requires medication for high blood pressure and Covid is rampant in the Afghan prison system.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Yemen: suspected AQ abduct UN workers |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/12/five-un-workers-abducted-by-suspected-al-qaida-militants-in-yemen |
| GIST | <p>Suspected al-Qaida militants have abducted five UN workers in southern Yemen, Yemeni officials said on Saturday.</p> <p>The officials said the workers were abducted in the southern province of Abyan late on Friday and taken to an unknown location. They include four Yemenis and a foreigner, they said.</p> <p>Russell Geekie, a spokesperson for the top UN official in Yemen, said: “The United Nations is in close contact with the authorities to secure their release.”</p> <p>Tribal leaders said they were negotiating with the abductors to secure the workers’ release. They said the abductors demanded a ransom and the release of some militants imprisoned by the internationally recognised government.</p> <p>The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to brief media and the tribal leaders did so for fear of reprisals.</p> <p>The secessionist Southern Transitional Council, which controls much of Yemen’s south and is at odds with the Yemeni government, condemned the abductions as a “terrorist operation”.</p> <p>The Yemeni government confirmed that the workers with the UN Department of Security and Safety were abducted by unknown armed men, adding that it was working to secure their release. It didn’t provide further details.</p> <p>Abductions are frequent in Yemen, an impoverished nation where armed tribesmen and al-Qaida-linked militants take hostages to swap for prisoners or cash.</p> <p>Al-Qaida in the Arabian peninsula, or AQAP, has long been considered the global network’s most dangerous branch, and has attempted to carry out attacks on the US mainland.</p> <p>Yemen has been convulsed by civil war since 2014, when the Iran-backed Houthi rebels took control of the capital Sana’a and much of the country’s north, forcing the internationally recognised government to flee to the south, then to Saudi Arabia.</p> <p>A Saudi-led coalition entered the war in March 2015, backed by the United States, to try to restore President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi to power.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 France: troops kill militants Sahel region |
| SOURCE | https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/france-says-40-militants-killed-benin-burkina-faso-border-2022-02-12/ |
| GIST | <p>PARIS, Feb 12 (Reuters) - French troops killed 40 militants on the Benin-Burkina Faso border in West Africa's Sahel region, the French government said on Saturday.</p> <p>The action followed an attack on park rangers in northern Benin on Tuesday in which a French national was among eight people killed.</p> |

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Afghan central bank: US plan an 'injustice' |
| SOURCE | https://www.reuters.com/markets/funds/afghan-central-bank-says-us-plan-frozen-funds-an-injustice-2022-02-12/ |
| GIST | <p>KABUL, Feb 12 (Reuters) - Afghanistan's central bank on Saturday criticised Washington's plan to use half the bank's \$7 billion in frozen assets on U.S. soil for humanitarian aid and set aside the rest to possibly satisfy lawsuits over the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.</p> <p>U.S. administration officials said on Friday they would work to ensure access to \$3.5 billion of the assets would benefit the Afghan people, amid calls for the money to be used to address a deepening economic crisis since the Taliban seized power last year.</p> <p>The other half of the funds would remain in the United States, subject to ongoing litigation targeting the Taliban, including by relatives of those who died in the Sept. 11 attacks, the officials said.</p> <p>Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) criticised the decision, saying its assets had been invested in the United States in line with international practices, and belonged to the people of Afghanistan.</p> <p>"DAB considers the latest decision of USA on blocking FX (foreign exchange) reserves and allocating them to irrelevant purposes, injustice to the people of Afghanistan," the central bank said in a statement.</p> <p>"(DAB) will never accept if the FX reserves of Afghanistan is paid under the name of compensation or humanitarian assistance to others and wants the reversal of the decision and release of all FX reserves of Afghanistan," it added.</p> <p>The central bank funds have been frozen since the Taliban took over the country as foreign forces withdrew in August.</p> <p>The frozen funding combined with sanctions and a drop off in development funding have sent the country's economy into freefall, unleashing a humanitarian crisis.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Taliban free detained UN staff, journalists |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/taliban-detain-unhcr-staff-foreign-journalists-kabul-82825553 |
| GIST | <p>KABUL, Afghanistan -- The Taliban released two foreign journalists working with the U.N. refugee agency and several of the aid organization's Afghan staff on Friday, UNHCR said, hours after news broke about their detentions in the capital, Kabul.</p> <p>The announcement followed a tweet by the Taliban-appointed deputy minister of culture and information, Zabihullah Mujahid, who said they were detained because they didn't have documents that properly identified them as UNHCR. Mujahid said they were freed after their identities were confirmed.</p> <p>"We are relieved to confirm the release in Kabul of the two journalists on assignment with UNHCR, and the Afghan nationals working with them," the Geneva-based organization said in a brief two-sentence statement. "We are grateful to all who expressed concern and offered help. We remain committed to the people of Afghanistan."</p> <p>The development in Kabul comes as President Joe Biden signed an executive order that promised \$3.5 billion — out of \$7 billion of Afghanistan's assets frozen in the United States — would be given to families of America's 9/11 victims. The other \$3.5 billion would be freed for Afghan aid. The order would allow U.S. financial institutions to facilitate access to the money by humanitarian groups, which would then give it directly to the Afghan people.</p> |

One of the detained foreign journalists was Andrew North, a former British Broadcasting Corporation journalist who has worked extensively in Afghanistan. His wife, Natalia Antelava had earlier issued a plea on Twitter for his release.

“Andrew was in Kabul working for the UNHCR @Refugees trying to help the people of Afghanistan,” Antelava said. “We are extremely concerned for his safety & call on anyone with influence to help secure his release.”

The Committee to Protect Journalist had also condemned the detentions and called for the immediate release of the journalists.

“The Taliban must immediately release Andrew North and all other journalists held for their work, and cease harassing and detaining members of the press,” the CPJ statement said, noting they were detained on Tuesday.

The Taliban swept over Afghanistan, capturing Kabul and much of the country in mid-August, as U.S. and NATO troops were in the final, chaotic weeks of their pullout following the 20-year intervention.

“The Taliban’s detention of two journalists on assignment with the U.N. refugee agency is a sad reflection of the overall decline of press freedom and increasing attacks on journalists under Taliban rule,” Steven Butler, CPJ’s Asia program coordinator, said in Washington.

Also released on Friday was Parvaneh Ibrahimkhel, a women's rights activist detained more than two weeks ago. She spoke to local TOLO TV to confirm that she was free but few other details were immediately available. The international community had also demanded her freedom, as well as that of four other women activists.

Since taking control, the Taliban have imposed widespread restrictions, many of them directed at women. Women have been banned from many jobs, outside the health and education field, their access to education has been restricted beyond sixth grade and they have been ordered to wear the Islamic headscarf, or hijab. The Taliban have, however, stopped short of imposing the burqa, which was compulsory when they previously ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s.

Universities for women have also begun to re-open and Taliban have promised girls would be allowed to resume their education beyond grade 6 after the Afghan New Year at the end of March.

In January, the Taliban stormed the Kabul home of activist Tamana Zaryabi Paryani who was among about 25 women who took part in an anti-Taliban protest a few days earlier against the hijab. It wasn't immediately clear whether Paryani was also being released, but there have been international demands for her freedom as well.

The international community has been wary of officially recognizing Afghanistan’s new rulers, concerned the Taliban would impose the same harsh rule as they did when they were in power the first time.

In the wake of the takeover, international funding was suspended and billions of dollars in Afghanistan's assets abroad, mostly in the U.S., were frozen and financial aid to the government was largely halted, pushing the Afghan economy further into a tailspin.

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Afghans protest US order freeing up \$3.5B |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/afghans-protest-us-order-give-35-911-victims-82844244 |
| GIST | KABUL, Afghanistan -- Demonstrators in Afghanistan’s capital Saturday condemned President Joe Biden’s order freeing up \$3.5 billion in Afghan assets held in the U.S. for families of America’s 9/11 victims — saying the money belongs to Afghans. |

Protesters who gathered outside Kabul's grand Eid Gah mosque asked America for financial compensation for the tens of thousands of Afghans killed during the last 20 years of war in Afghanistan.

Biden's order, signed Friday, allocates another \$3.5 billion in Afghan assets for humanitarian aid to a trust fund to be managed by the U.N. to provide aid to Afghans. The country's economy is teetering on the brink of collapse after international money stopped coming into Afghanistan with the arrival in mid-August of the Taliban.

Afghanistan's Central Bank called on Biden to reverse his order and release the funds to it, saying in a statement Saturday that they belonged to the people of Afghanistan and not a government, party or group.

Torek Farhadi, a financial adviser to Afghanistan's former U.S.-backed government, questioned the U.N. managing Afghan Central Bank reserves. He said those funds are not meant for humanitarian aid but "to back up the country's currency, help in monetary policy and manage the country's balance of payment."

He also questioned the legality of Biden's order.

"These reserves belong to the people of Afghanistan, not the Taliban ... Biden's decision is one-sided and does not match with international law," said Farhadi. "No other country on Earth makes such confiscation decisions about another country's reserves."

Afghanistan has about \$9 billion in assets overseas, including the \$7 billion in the United States. The rest is mostly in Germany, the United Arab Emirates and Switzerland.

"What about our Afghan people who gave many sacrifices and thousands of losses of lives?" asked the demonstration's organizer, Abdul Rahman, a civil society activist.

Rahman said he planned to organize more demonstrations across the capital to protest Biden's order. "This money belongs to the people of Afghanistan, not to the United States. This is the right of Afghans," he said.

Misspelled placards in English accused the United States of being cruel and of stealing the money of Afghans.

Taliban political spokesman Mohammad Naeem accused the Biden administration in a tweet late Friday of showing "the lowest level of humanity ... of a country and a nation."

Biden's Friday order generated a social media storm with Twitter saying #USA—stole—money—from—afghan was trending among Afghans. Tweets repeatedly pointed out that the 9/11 hijackers were Saudi nationals, not Afghans.

Obaidullah Baheer, a lecturer at the American University in Afghanistan and a social activist, tweeted: "Let's remind the world that #AfghansDidntCommit911 and that #BidenStealingAfgMoney!"

Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was brought to Afghanistan by Afghan warlords after being expelled from Sudan in 1996. Those same warlords would later ally with the U.S.-led coalition to oust the Taliban in 2001. However, it was Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar who refused to hand over bin Laden to the U.S. after the devastating 9/11 attacks that killed thousands.

Still, some analysts took to Twitter to question Biden's order.

Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the U.S.-based Wilson Center, called Biden's order to divert \$3.5 billion away from Afghanistan "heartless."

“It’s great that \$3.5B in new humanitarian aid for Afghanistan has been freed up. But to take another \$3.5B that belongs to the Afghan people, and divert it elsewhere--that is misguided and quite frankly heartless,” he tweeted.

Kugelman also said the opposition to Biden's order crossed Afghanistan's wide political divide.

“I can’t remember the last time so many people of such vastly different worldviews were so united over a US policy decision on Afghanistan,” he tweeted.

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Suspicious, Unusual

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Unruly flight passenger; emergency landing |
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| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/13/us/american-air-emergency-landing.html |
| GIST | <p>An American Airlines flight from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., made a rapid emergency landing in Kansas City, Mo., on Sunday afternoon after an unruly passenger tried to break into the cockpit and then attempted to open an exit door, witnesses said.</p> <p>The passenger was subdued by crew members and other passengers. He was taken into custody after the flight landed.</p> <p>In a statement, American Airlines said the flight, American Airlines Flight 1775, landed safely in Kansas City, where law enforcement officials met the plane. Charles A. Dayoub, an F.B.I. special agent in charge in Kansas City, said in a statement that the passenger was taken into custody after “interfering with the flight crew.”</p> <p>Stacy Day, a spokeswoman for the airline, said that the passenger was “ultimately subdued by our crew and with the help of other passengers.”</p> <p>Carlos Rojas, 33, was among the passengers who intervened. He said he had been dozing off while sitting a row behind the first-class section when the lights in the plane were abruptly turned back on. He took his headphones off and noticed a struggle between flight attendants and a passenger in the front of the plane. A nearby passenger enlisted Mr. Rojas, an Air Force reservist, to assist the flight attendants.</p> <p>The man at the center of the altercation, who appeared to be middle-aged, seemed distraught and paranoid, Mr. Rojas said. Earlier in the flight, he added, others saw the passenger pace the aisles.</p> <p>“When I went up, it looked like the guy was trying to open the exterior door of the plane to the outside,” Mr. Rojas said. “So we were kind of keeping him from doing that and just trying to subdue him and make sure that he was taken down and everybody was OK.”</p> <p>Mouaz Moustafa, a passenger from Washington, described a chaotic scene as the plane started descending into Kansas City without warning after the struggle with the passenger.</p> <p>He said the man tried to get into the cockpit and then tried to exit via the main door before he was held down by several passengers.</p> <p>“A flight attendant ran to the back of the plane and got the coffee pot and continues to bash the guy on the head,” Mr. Moustafa said in an interview as the plane was being held on the tarmac. The man was “bleeding profusely,” he added.</p> <p>“I honestly thought today I might die,” he said.</p> |

Ultimately, it took three flight attendants and three passengers, including Mr. Rojas, to restrain the man, move him to the floor and then bind his hands and ankles with tape and zip ties provided by the flight attendants, Mr. Rojas said. The passenger remained on the floor for about 15 minutes until the plane landed and the authorities collected him, Mr. Rojas said.

As Mr. Moustafa, 37, was being interviewed by phone from his seat, the pilot came by and talked to the passengers about how the man had tried and failed to open the cockpit door.

Disturbances on flights have surged during the coronavirus pandemic, and many of the incidents have involved passengers who disagree with mask mandates.

Last year, the Federal Aviation Administration conducted more than 1,000 investigations of unruly passengers — more than in the previous seven years combined.

Karen Maria Alston, who lives in Washington, said she was sitting in the 17th row of the plane watching the movie “Dune” when she saw some men rush into the first-class section. She was not able to see what was happening, she said, but the commotion and the plane’s ensuing descent were frightening and “extremely stressful.”

“I need a drink and I am so thankful,” Ms. Alston said in a text message after the plane landed in Kansas City.

She said that passengers waited on the plane as officers with the Federal Bureau of Investigation conducted interviews with witnesses.

Then, told to disembark, the passengers waited for about three hours in the Kansas City airport, unwinding from their tense shared experience and celebrating the three passengers who intervened.

Mr. Rojas and other passengers huddled around a little television by a bar, unwinding and watching the Super Bowl, “just making the best out of the situation,” he said.

Three hours later, they were back on the plane headed to Washington.

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 DNA tests for body-parts found in Arizona |
| SOURCE | https://www.king5.com/article/news/investigations/body-parts-washington-residents-found-arizona/281-a376d665-59c3-4c94-808f-e8f0e03085b6 |
| GIST | <p>ARIZONA, USA — Since a grisly discovery in the central Arizona desert, authorities have been quietly collecting DNA samples from a dozen or so Washington state families.</p> <p>Authorities are trying to determine the identities of human body parts that were found in two “dumpsites” in December 2020.</p> <p>The KING 5 Investigators learned that detectives from the Yavapai County Sheriff’s office contacted the Washington State Patrol last year and passed along a list of 13 potential victims. State patrol detectives fanned out to collect DNA from their relatives.</p> <p>It began when a hiker near the Prescott National Forest reported scattered body parts including knees, arms and legs - 24 body parts in all. A day later, on Dec. 27, 2020, a hunter found five human heads about 10 miles away.</p> <p>Any theories that it could have been the work of a serial killer were laid to rest by clues like a “small silver tag” similar to a medical bracelet, medical gauze, and packaging that led the medical examiner to conclude the “human remains were being used for research.”</p> |

That information led detectives to a Seattle company called FutureGenex, a firm that solicited donations of human bodies that it supplied to medical training and research companies.

FutureGenex was a “body broker” operating in the largely unlicensed and unregulated market of “whole body donation.”

In October, the [KING 5 Investigators reported on an autopsy “show”](#) in the Pacific Northwest in which the audience paid up to \$500 each to view the dissection of a corpse in a hotel ballroom. The cadaver was provided by a [Las Vegas body broker called Med Ed Labs](#). A [Med Ed](#) manager said the company was duped into providing the body by the show’s organizer, who claimed it would be a seminar for medical education.

The case involving FutureGenex, and its owner Walter Mitchell, is only the latest outrage in an industry that some critics call the “wild west.”

Bodies dumped in Arizona

The doorbell at Evans Wilson’s Edmonds home rang early in 2020 and he answered to find a Washington State Patrol detective at his door.

“He wanted to do a DNA test on me so that it could be determined whether any of the remains in Arizona were my mother’s,” Wilson said.

That’s when Wilson first learned what might have happened to his 104-year-old mother’s body after he donated it to FutureGenex.

Wilson arranged with the University of Washington’s Willed Body Program to donate his mother’s body to the medical school. Maudine Wilson once worked for the university and her son believed she would want to further the education of medical students.

After her death in October of 2019, he called the Willed Body Program’s hotline as instructed and was told the program would not accept her body.

Evans said during that call he was referred to FutureGenex as an alternative.

The contract Wilson signed with FutureGenex said the donated body would be used for “education and training, scientific advancement, and/or research and development purposes.”

But after the visit with the detective, Wilson had to call his sister Marie Christianson in Bothell and tell her the news of what might have happened to their mother.

“It was hurtful to think she would be treated that way. Not only her but anyone else. I thought it was disgusting,” Christianson said.

According to police reports, FutureGenex folded in February of 2020 and Walter Mitchell packed up five human bodies and transported them to Arizona.

Mitchell refused to answer questions when approached by deputies, so why he might have dumped the remains in the desert is a mystery.

Mitchell is in jail in Yavapai County awaiting trial after pleading not guilty to 29 counts of abandonment or concealment of a dead body. His defense lawyer in Arizona would not comment on the case.

Authorities in Yavapai County refuse to discuss their case.

Identifying the remains

Through a records request to the Washington State Patrol, the KING 5 Investigators obtained the names of 13 of Mitchell's donors that Washington State Patrol detectives have attempted to contact.

By comparing samples from the body parts to the DNA of living relatives, detectives have been able to positively identify some of the remains.

Evans Wilson said the DNA test eventually showed that his mother's remains were not among those found in Arizona.

"It wasn't a match and my mother was not part of the remains that were discovered in the desert," Wilson said.

But KING 5 contacted three families that said DNA resulted in a positive match. Two were from the Puget Sound area and one was from Moses Lake.

Only the family of Doug Patterson of Camano Island, who died from heart failure in 2019, gave permission to release his identity. The other two families said the news from Arizona was so upsetting that they did not want to share it with close relatives.

'This happens in America'

Walter Mitchell was a former employee of Biological Resource Center (BRC), one of the most notorious "body broker" prosecutions in the country.

David TeSelle, a Denver attorney who sued BRC on behalf of several donor families, secured a \$58 million jury verdict against the company for its handling of donated corpses.

"This happens in America, not in a third-world country, but that in America, people are able to get donated bodies, cut them up, and sell them off a price list, often on the black market," TeSelle said.

The FBI raided BRC in Phoenix in 2014 and its owner Stephen Gore was convicted of running an illegal enterprise for selling body parts from people with infectious diseases to unwitting buyers, among other crimes.

Mitchell was not accused of, or charged, with any crime.

"[FBI agents] found a large male torso with a small women's head sewn on top of it, as if they were mocking what they were doing," TeSelle said.

TeSelle said the industry is so unregulated it requires no license in most states and there are no industry standards.

The business of whole-body donations is completely separate from the organ harvesting and transplant trade, which is highly regulated by federal law.

The organ donor agreement on driver's licenses, for example, does not include whole body donation. The American Association of Tissue Banks calls whole body donation organizations "Non-Transplant anatomical donation organizations" or NADOs.

Because of abuses over the years by several NADOs, the Association of Tissue Banks instituted a program to inspect and certify qualifying NADOs.

[There are seven accredited](#) NADOs across the country, including MedCure in Portland, OR.

Marie Christianson said even though her mother's remains were not dumped in the Arizona desert, she is left to wonder if the ashes that Mitchell returned to her in an urn are those of her mother.

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| | <p>She's astonished no laws ensure that body brokers live up to their end of the bargain.</p> <p>"I think it's appalling. I really do," Christianson said.</p> <p>Interested in body donation?</p> <p>The American Association of Tissue Banks warns there are many firms that accept whole body donations in the US. But only seven of them are accredited by the AATB.</p> <p>This means that participating donation firms must: allow independent inspections of their facilities, maintain sufficient records and prove that they are providing a supply of safe, donated human tissue.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Three Sisters ground rises faster than usual |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/land-around-oregons-three-sisters-volcanoes-is-rising-faster-than-usual-scientists-say/ |
| GIST | <p>The ground is swelling slightly faster than usual beneath parts of the Three Sisters volcanic region in Oregon, a new study shows, but scientists say there's no signs of an imminent eruption.</p> <p>An uplift of about an inch in the ground was detected roughly 3 miles west of South Sister, according to researchers from the Cascades Volcano Observatory of the United States Geological Survey.</p> <p>Seismologists also detected "brief bursts" of small earthquakes recently, once each in October, December and January.</p> <p>Using GPS and satellite imaging technology, researchers found that an area about 12 miles wide saw a ground uplift of about 0.9 inches between the summers of 2020 and 2021, and an additional 0.2 inches near the center of that area since April 2021.</p> <p>While the findings did detect an increase in the rate of ground uplift — second only to the rate measured in the same area between 1999 and 2000 — the region has experienced an uplift of about 12 inches over the past 25 years.</p> <p>Continuous GPS monitoring, satellite imaging and other tools allow seismologists to understand what's normal behavior for a volcanic region, and what isn't.</p> <p>Ground uplift west of South Sister is most likely caused by the accumulation of magma or magmatic fluids — water and gas — but these things could have begun decades if not centuries before local seismologists began keeping a record.</p> <p>Before an eruption, magma needs to break through layers of rock and would trigger strong quakes and release gas in the process. The interconnectedness of volcanoes in the Cascades suggests an eruption, if one were to happen, would not be singular but could affect a string of volcanoes simultaneously.</p> <p>Of course, there's no guarantee an eruption will ever occur in the area.</p> <p>According to CVO Scientist-in-Charge Jon Major, signs of an imminent eruption would include much faster ground uplift and an increase in the frequency of earthquakes that are bigger and occur at shallower depths.</p> <p>"We're not seeing anything like that right now," Major said. "What we're detecting right now can very much be part and parcel of normal behavior. Until 25 years ago, we just never had the technology to be able to see that."</p> <p>The last eruption at South Sister occurred about 2,000 years ago but it was in 2001 that researchers detected ground uplift west of South Sister.</p> |

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| | <p>According to the USGS, Oregon and Washington, with more than 25 active volcanoes, comprise one of the most volcanically active regions in the country.</p> <p>The uplift in the Three Sisters area is most likely caused by magma 4 miles underground. Bursts of small earthquakes are common in the area and throughout the Cascade range, which is essentially a chain of active volcanoes.</p> <p>“These technologies now help us understand what is typical and what is normal,” Major said, “What we want to be able to detect is the abnormal.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 ‘Silent’ quake caused mysterious tsunami |
| SOURCE | https://www.newsweek.com/how-huge-silent-earthquake-caused-mysterious-global-tsunami-1678486 |
| GIST | <p>Researchers have published an investigation into the mysteries behind an enormous "hidden" earthquake that caused a global tsunami last year.</p> <p>In a study published in <i>Geophysical Research Letters</i> on February 8, scientists said that a total of five earthquakes, including one massive, "hidden" tremor, created the tsunami after striking close to the South Sandwich Islands on August 12, 2021, in the remote Southern Ocean off the coast of the continent of South America.</p> <p>The study showed that tsunami-causing earthquakes such as the August 12 incident had complex patterns that could confound how scientists measure major tectonic activity.</p> <p>The authors suggested that existing methods for mitigating the potential damage of earthquakes and tsunamis could need rethinking to make sure tsunami warnings were reliable.</p> <p>Researchers described an initial rupture that happened deep below the oceanic crust in between the South American and South Sandwich tectonic plates at a depth of around 29 miles. This earthquake, which measured 7.5 on the Richter Scale, then triggered other quakes, including a much shallower—and much more violent—third earthquake.</p> <p>This later 8.2 magnitude earthquake generated most of the energy in the rupture series, the researchers said, and had far-reaching effects, with waves recorded thousands of miles from its source.</p> <p>The paper said that the tsunami caused by the earthquake spread far out across the ocean, reaching the North Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans, where tide gauges measured peaks of several inches over 6,200 miles away in some cases.</p> <p>Yet for such a huge and globe-spanning event, the earthquake left barely any trace in typical data used by scientists to study such phenomena, puzzling researchers as to what had really happened.</p> <p>"The third event is special because it was huge, and it was silent," Zhe Jia, a seismologist at the California Institute of Technology, told news website Phys.org. "In the data we normally look at it was almost invisible.</p> <p>"We need to rethink our way to mitigate earthquake-tsunami hazards. To do that, we need to rapidly and accurately characterize the true size of big earthquakes, as well as their physical processes."</p> <p>The study showed that the signature of the larger, shallower earthquake was initially lost in the complex data caused by the multiple series of quakes that took place on August 12.</p> <p>"It's hard to find the second earthquake because it's buried in the first one," Jia said. "It's very seldom complex earthquakes like this are observed ... And if we don't use the right dataset, we cannot really see what was hidden inside."</p> |

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Hidden ways companies raise prices |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/companies-hidden-inflation-consumer-price-index-11644549254?mod=hp_lead_pos7 |
| GIST | <p>Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises Inc., a Chicago-based restaurant group, has added a 3% “processing fee” to checks at many of its restaurants. Harley-Davidson Inc. added a charge last year to its motorcycles to cover rising material costs. Peloton Interactive Inc. in January began charging \$250 for delivery and setup of some of its indoor bikes, a service that was previously included free.</p> <p>Companies are finding all kinds of ways to make consumers pay for rising costs. Often that is not reflected in the posted price.</p> <p>The Labor Department’s consumer-price index, which measures how much consumers pay for goods and services, rose to 7.5% in January compared with the same month a year earlier—the biggest rise since February 1982.</p> <p>The index accounts for some changes that raise consumers’ costs, such as smaller package sizes and some fees attached to hotel packages or car purchases. But it can miss other ways in which dollars don’t stretch as far-- a hotel that changes sheets only between guests, a theme park that cancels its free airport shuttle, or an auto dealer that requires customers to buy a protective paint coating with a car.</p> <p>With supply-chain challenges, pent-up demand and a tight labor market leading to inflation, businesses are looking for subtle ways to pass along rising costs. Particularly in the food business, companies have long used what the industry calls weight-outs, or shrinking package contents instead of raising prices, during economic distress periods such as the 2007-2009 recession.</p> <p>“There is a lot more to come,” said Doug Baker, head of industry relations for FMI, a food-industry trade organization. “Everything is on the table in an effort to deal with those cost increases, and at the same time, not make it too difficult for consumers to shop.”</p> <p>A global computer-chip shortage has reduced vehicle inventories just as Americans were buying cars in record numbers, pushing up prices for new vehicles. In many cases, they are selling for thousands of dollars above manufacturers’ suggested retail prices, said Tom McParland, founder of Automatch Consulting, which helps consumers find vehicles.</p> <p>“They’re calling it a market adjustment fee,” said Mr. McParland. “That’s the new thing they are doing: hiding markups with substantially overpriced accessories like mud flaps and cargo protectors.” Ford Motor Co. and General Motors Co. have said they are cracking down on dealerships using that tactic.</p> <p>Harley fees</p> <p>Base prices on Harley-Davidson’s motorcycles haven’t gone up much in recent years, the Milwaukee company said. But to cover rising costs, it added a mandatory materials surcharge last year, which dealers are passing on to customers. Dealers said the fee, which varies based on the model, is easier for the company to adjust than base motorcycle prices when costs decrease.</p> <p>Dealers said the fee is \$850 to \$1,500 a bike. Harley this week told analysts that the surcharges helped boost revenue during the fourth quarter last year.</p> <p>Some restaurants are adding new fees in response to escalating costs for food and packaging, and for wage increases executives say are needed to keep cooks and servers. Brinker International Inc.’s Maggiano’s Little Italy in October 2020 started charging \$5 for a second, to-go pasta dish offered as part of a two-entree deal. For about a decade before the pandemic, the chain had offered a second classic pasta dish free.</p> |

“We’ve had no push back,” Maggiano’s president Steve Provost told investors last October. A Brinker spokeswoman said the price change allowed the company to invest more in the value of its carry-out offerings.

When Michael Pfeifer, a marketing professional, picked up the check for his meal at [RPM](#) Seafood in Chicago this week, he was surprised to find a 3% Covid surcharge added to the bill. “What’s next?” he said. “A dishware rental fee?”

The fee, added in the spring of 2020, offsets the cost of pandemic-related government regulations and mandates, said RJ Melman, president of Lettuce Entertain You, which owns RPM. “These fees can be removed and refunded for any guest that requests,” he said, “no questions asked.”

Peloton, according to its website, is adding the new \$250 fees on bikes and a \$350 delivery-and-setup fee for some of its treadmills. It cut the price of its original stationary bike in August to \$1,495 from \$1,895. With the added fees, the total price is now back up to about \$1,745, as the company dealt with slowing demand and its own rising costs.

Peloton declined to comment on the fees. In an earnings call on Tuesday, Peloton CFO Jill Woodworth said that the fees could cut into consumer demand but that they were part of a “critical learning” process as the company restructures and cuts costs for the post-pandemic era.

[Walt Disney](#) Co.’s Disney World in Orlando stopped offering free airport shuttles—known as the Magical Express—this year, leaving Disney guests to pay for their own transportation. The parks added several fees last year while keeping the base ticket price at \$109. A fast-pass system that let park guests make reservations for rides, which used to be free, was discontinued and replaced by a new system that costs \$15. And some popular rides, like Star Wars: Rise of the Resistance and Space Mountain, now cost between \$7 and \$15, on top of the park admission ticket.

Disney offers “a wide range of options to match different budgets and interests,” said Disney spokesman Avery Maehrer.

At its theme-park restaurants, Disney is trying to avoid across-the-board price increases, Disney CFO Christine McCarthy told analysts in November. “We can substitute products. We can cut portion size, which is probably good for some people’s waistlines,” she said. “But we aren’t going to go just straight across and increase prices.”

Consumer backlash

Consumer pressure has led some companies to back off added fees, including [Frontier Group Holdings](#) Inc. The airline, which uses a la carte pricing that lets frugal travelers choose to forgo amenities, in May 2021 added a \$1.59-per-flight-segment Covid-related fee. After consumer backlash, Frontier in June stopped breaking it out as a component of its base fare but it didn’t stop charging it. Frontier didn’t respond to requests for comment.

In a press release it said: “The charge, which was included in the airline’s total promoted fare versus an add-on fee, was meant to provide transparency and delineate what portion of the fare was going toward COVID-related business recovery.”

Some of [Marriott International](#) Inc.’s Autograph Collection hotels had been charging a “sustainability fee” of about \$5 a night. The company that manages the properties, Innkeeper Hospitality Services LLC, says it covered things like more-efficient HVAC systems.

They stopped charging the fee several weeks ago, “because we understand that while we believe in environmentally responsible stewardship, not everyone cares about our planet’s health,” IHS CEO Amrit Gill said. He said Marriott had asked the company to stop charging the fee. Marriott declined to comment.

The Biden administration has begun to look into some forms of hidden fees, which it calls “junk fees.” The administration says the amount being charged is not always tied to the costs faced by the company providing the goods or services. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau is seeking public input on financial services, such as bank overdraft fees, while the Transportation Department is planning actions on airline baggage fees.

John Fiorello, a father of four in Torrington, Conn., was dismayed to see prices rising in his local grocery-store aisles but was initially pleased to see that the blocks of cheese he usually buys hadn’t gone up much in price—perhaps 10 cents, he said. Then he noticed that the package had shrunk, to 12 ounces from 16.

“I picked up the block and said, ‘this is definitely smaller,’ ” Mr. Fiorello said. “It just adds an extra layer of stress.”

Shrinkflation, as economists call it, tends to be easier for companies to pass on to consumers. Despite labels that show price by weight, research shows that most customers look at only the overall price.

“There are sizes that people remember, like a half gallon of ice cream,” said John Gourville, a Harvard Business School professor. “Once you break from iconic sizes, it’s pretty easy to move from 13 ounces to 12 ounces.”

Over the years, tuna cans have come to contain less tuna and toilet-paper rolls less tissue, said Burt Flickinger III, managing director of Strategic Resource Group, a consulting firm that works with consumer-product companies. “Historically,” he said, “it’s called a ‘cheater pack.’ ”

Companies have become more sophisticated and use [multiple tactics to protect their profitability](#), he said. They can pull back on discounts, stop making low-selling products and create new varieties that sell for higher prices

Downsized Oreos

Oreo-maker Mondelez International Inc. raised prices by an average of 6% to 7% in the U.S. last month, but it wasn’t enough to make up for its higher costs, the company said. So Mondelez has been introducing new sizes and flavors it says are more profitable.

Oreo’s new 110th Birthday chocolate confetti-cake cookies cost about 10 cents more than regular Double Stuf Oreos at several grocery stores, even though the new flavor comes in a slightly smaller package. At a [Target](#) Corp. store in Chicago, the limited-edition birthday Oreos, which came out January, cost \$3.79 for a 24-cookie package and the Double Stuf ones cost \$3.69 for a 30-cookie package.

Retailers set the final prices. Mondelez said it charges the same for the two products, and its limited edition flavors are typically different-sized packages than regular ones. A Target spokesperson said: “We’re priced competitively throughout the markets we do business.”

Economists and analysts at the Labor Department’s Bureau of Labor Statistics monitor prices of thousands of goods and services. They can account for shrinkflation, because they track the cost of certain products by weight and quantity—so a cereal box that costs the same amount but now has 30% less volume would be registered as a price increase.

They said their efforts can’t identify every fee or dropped amenity, such as a hotel room rate that remains the same but that no longer includes fresh towels or a hot breakfast. “We do not capture the decrease in service quality associated with cleaning a room every two days rather than one,” said Jonathan Church, a BLS economist.

Jeremiah Mayfield and Carlos Larrea stayed at Alohilani Resort in Honolulu in December and opted for a \$75 a-night upgrade to “club level” for free food and drinks. But they said they could rarely use it because the resort didn’t have enough staff to replenish the club-level amenities. After complaining, they were offered free dinner.

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| | <p>Alohilani General Manager Matthew Grauso said that quality and efficient guest service are top priorities and that he tries to remedy any shortfalls immediately, adding, “The pandemic has presented a unique set of challenges within the hospitality industry.”</p> <p>“We gave them hell for it,” Mr. Mayfield said. “We paid \$800 a night. We never expected it would be so scarce in terms of service and amenities.”</p> <p>Many hotel chains are replacing complimentary hot breakfast buffets with a snack bag. Some fitness centers and pools remain closed, and housekeeping doesn’t refresh rooms daily. Some guests feel like they are getting less for their money.</p> <p>InterContinental Hotels Group PLC, which owns Holiday Inn, said it has been working with hotels to return amenities and make it right if guests aren’t satisfied. “Hotel teams have been overcoming many challenges including supply chain and labor shortages, changing health guidance and regulatory requirements,” an IHG spokesperson said.</p> <p>On a recent trip to St. Louis, Meg Hinkley booked a Holiday Inn because it said online that it offered room service. When she arrived, the restaurant was closed, so there was no room service. She said she would have stayed at a lower-priced hotel if she had known. “I was paying for that convenience.”</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Drought empties reservoir: ghost village |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/11/ghost-village-emerges-in-spain-as-drought-empties-reservoir-aceredo |
| GIST | <p>A ghost village that has emerged as drought has nearly emptied a dam on the Spanish-Portuguese border is drawing crowds of tourists with its eerie, grey ruins.</p> <p>With the reservoir at 15% of its capacity, details of a life frozen in 1992, when the Acedo village in Spain’s north-western Galicia region was flooded to create the Alto Lindoso reservoir, are being revealed once more.</p> <p>“It’s as if I’m watching a movie. I have a feeling of sadness,” said 65-year-old pensioner Maximino Pérez Romero, from A Coruña. “My feeling is that this is what will happen over the years due to drought and all that, with climate change.”</p> <p>Walking on the muddy ground cracked by the drought in some spots, visitors found partially collapsed roofs, bricks and wooden debris that once made up doors or beams, and even a drinking fountain with water still streaming from a rusty pipe.</p> <p>Crates with empty beer bottles were stacked by what used to be a cafe, and a semi-destroyed old car was rusting away by a stone wall. Drone footage showed the derelict buildings.</p> <p>María del Carmen Yañez, mayor of the larger Lobios council, of which Acedo is part, blamed the situation on the lack of rain in recent months, particularly in January, but also on what she said was “quite aggressive exploitation” by Portugal’s power utility EDP, which manages the reservoir.</p> <p>On 1 February, Portugal’s government ordered six dams, including Alto Lindoso, to nearly halt water use for electricity production and irrigation, due to the worsening drought.</p> <p>EDP had no immediate comment when contacted by Reuters.</p> <p>Questions over the sustainability of reservoirs are not new. Last year, several Spanish villages complained about how power utilities used them after a rapid draw-down from a lake by Iberdrola in western Spain. The company said it was following the rules.</p> |

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| | <p>Environment ministry data shows Spain's reservoirs are at 44% of their capacity, well below the average of about 61% over the last decade, but still above levels registered in a 2018 drought. A ministry source said drought indicators showed a potential worsening in the coming weeks, but did not yet detect a generalised problem throughout the country.</p> <p>José Álvarez, a former construction worker from Lobios, said he felt a mix of nostalgia and fatalism at he remembered his working days in Aceredo. "It's terrible, but it is what it is. That's life. Some die and others live," he said.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Used cars selling above new car costs? |
| SOURCE | https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/crazy-used-cars-selling-thousands-above-new-car-msrp/GNRBRIHY5F45MT2OPKA2N2FTU/ |
| GIST | <p>KING COUNTY, Wash. — It's a miserable time for car shoppers right now as the market continues getting pinched by supply chain shortages.</p> <p>It means car prices are soaring with no clear end in sight.</p> <p>Carfax says used car prices are up 40% from this time last year — a record high – with some used cars selling for thousands above new car sticker prices.</p> <p>"There's a shortage of cars! It's kind of crazy," said Tom Voelk, an automotive writer and car review guru.</p> <p>KIRO7 caught up with him Friday as he was reviewing a Jaguar F-Type near Magnuson Park – an \$86,000 car.</p> <p>But even if you're shopping for just something that'll get you to work, it's going to cost you.</p> <p>"Some (dealerships) are jacking the prices up \$5,000, maybe \$10,000, depending on the price of the car," Voelk said.</p> <p>The ongoing microchip shortage means new cars are rolling off the lines very slowly.</p> <p>Brotherton Cadillac in Renton said they usually have 200 cars on the lot, but on Friday they only had a dozen.</p> <p>"We are receiving about 35, 40 new cars each month, so there is a steady pipeline, just not at the volume we would like," said owner Brad Brotherton in an email.</p> <p>Lee Johnson Nissan of Kirkland recently said it had six new cars to sell, though its normal inventory is more than 100.</p> <p>"It's not as if the dealers like this," Voelk said. "They have to pay their employees, taxes and their electricity bills. And they don't have cars to sell. It's tough for them too," he said.</p> <p>This reporter couldn't get into a new Honda CRV to test drive at Honda of Kirkland. Lee Johnson Nissan said it had no Nissan Pathfinders until March at the earliest. Brotherton Cadillac said it got nine new Buicks on Friday but expected them all to sell by the end of February.</p> <p>It means some lightly used cars are costing much more than new.</p> <p>iSeeCars.com said the top vehicle in Seattle doing just that is the Toyota Tacoma truck, which is selling for 20% or \$76,000 more than new manufacturer's suggested retail price.</p> |

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| | <p>Used car dealership Maharaja Motors in Lake City says it's good old supply and demand.</p> <p>Co-owner of the family business Sonny Khurana says they're selling a 2022 Tesla with 70 miles on it for \$54,000.</p> <p>"I think MSRP is about \$47,000," Khurana said. He speculates that the previous owner bought the car solely as an investment and to sell it above MSRP.</p> <p>"Cars cost us more, so you pass along the savings," Khurana said.</p> <p>There is another shortage hitting their business. They normally buy cars from around the country, but there is a lack of truck drivers to ship them.</p> <p>"It takes so long to get inventory right now — the delivery, it's become not worth the wait," Khurana said. He said he bought and paid for a car in Portland about a month ago, and it's still in Oregon. "It normally would be here in a week," he said.</p> <p>Voelk's advice for shoppers right now?</p> <p>"My best recommendation is if you don't have to buy a car, don't buy a car! Just be patient," he said. He said the market should get better in a year — possibly as soon as six months if you can wait.</p> |
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Crime, Criminals

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| HEADLINE | 02/14 Pedestrian deaths spike; reckless driving |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/14/us/pedestrian-deaths-pandemic.html |
| GIST | <p>ALBUQUERQUE — After a festive evening spent viewing a display of holiday lights, Aditya Bhattacharya and his family were crossing a street to head home.</p> <p>Then a driver blew past a red light, slamming into him and his 7-year-old son, Pronoy.</p> <p>"I took one step, that's the last thing I remember," said Mr. Bhattacharya, 45. "When I regained consciousness, all I could hear was my wife sitting on the sidewalk, screaming, 'Pronoy's dead.'"</p> <p>The boy's death at an Albuquerque crosswalk in December, and the seven-week manhunt to find the driver, jolted many people in this part of the West to the grim count of pedestrian deaths, which began surging in New Mexico and other states in 2020.</p> <p>Two years into the pandemic, such fatalities are soaring into record territory amid a nationwide flare-up in reckless driving. In various initiatives to reverse the trends, authorities in one state after another are citing factors from the rise in anxiety levels and pandemic drinking to the fraying of social norms.</p> <p>Last year, New Mexico recorded 99 pedestrian deaths, up from 81 in 2020 and 83 in 2019 and the most since it began tracking such incidents in the 1990s. But while Sun Belt states have been hit particularly hard, the pedestrian death toll spiked last year in many parts of the country.</p> <p>New Jersey had its highest number of pedestrian fatalities in more than 30 years. Last year was also the deadliest on Utah's roads since the start of the century, as pedestrian deaths rose 22 percent.</p> <p>Washington State ended 2021 with a 15-year high in traffic fatalities. And pedestrian deaths in Texas climbed last year to a record high.</p> |

Going into the pandemic, some traffic specialists were optimistic that pedestrian deaths would decline. After all, millions of motorists were slashing their driving time and hewing to social distancing measures.

The opposite happened.

Empty roads allowed some to drive much faster than before. Some police chiefs eased enforcement, wary of face-to-face contact. For reasons that psychologists and transit safety experts are just beginning to explain, drivers also seemed to get angrier.

Dr. David Spiegel, director of Stanford Medical School's Center on Stress and Health, said many drivers were grappling with what he calls "salience saturation."

"We're so saturated with fears about the virus and what it's going to do," Dr. Spiegel said. "People feel that they get a pass on other threats."

Dr. Spiegel said another factor was "social disengagement," which deprives people of social contact, a major source of pleasure, support and comfort. Combine that loss with overloading our capacity to gauge risks, Dr. Spiegel said, and people are not paying as much attention to driving safely.

"If they do, they don't care about it that much," Dr. Spiegel said. "There's the feeling that the rules are suspended and all bets are off."

Crashes killed more than 6,700 pedestrians in 2020, up about 5 percent from the estimated 6,412 the year before, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association.

Based on another commonly used road safety metric — vehicle miles traveled — the group projected that the pedestrian fatality rate [spiked about 21 percent in 2020](#) as deaths climbed sharply even though people drove much less that year, the largest ever year-over-year increase. And preliminary data from 2021 indicates yet another increase in the number of pedestrian deaths.

While other developed countries have made strides in [reducing pedestrian deaths](#) over the last several years, the pandemic has intensified several trends that have pushed the United States in the other direction. Crashes killing pedestrians climbed 46 percent over the last decade, compared with a 5 percent increase for all other crashes, according to the Governors Highway Safety Association.

Angie Schmitt, who describes pedestrian deaths as a "silent epidemic" [in a new book](#), said the reasons included an aging population, in which older pedestrians are more vulnerable, and the growth of the Sun Belt region, where cities were designed after World War II to prioritize speed over safety. And ballooning sizes of S.U.V.s and trucks, which have grown heavier with higher front ends, strike people on foot with greater force than before.

Following decades in which traffic fatalities declined in the United States, Ms. Schmitt noted that such deaths began climbing in 2009, when smaller sedans still accounted for most vehicles sold.

"Now, about three out of four new vehicles are pickup trucks, vans or S.U.V.s," Ms. Schmitt said. "Cars are getting bigger, faster and deadlier."

Others warn that since new vehicles have grown larger and safer for the people inside them, with features like lane-departure warnings and rearview cameras, some drivers are emboldened to dismiss the risks to pedestrians.

"There's a portion of the population that is incredibly frustrated, enraged, and some of that behavior shows up in their driving," said Mark Hallenbeck, director of the Washington State Transportation Center at the University of Washington. "We in our vehicles are given anonymity in this giant metal box around us, and we act out in ways that we wouldn't face to face."

The streets of Albuquerque, where Pronoy Bhattacharya was killed in the hit-and-run, showcase the challenges that pedestrians face. Around the sprawling metro area, home to almost one million people, drivers routinely run red lights or speed past stop signs. Cars [without license plates](#) abound on Albuquerque's roads.

Despite such behavior, residents say they can go years without seeing drivers pulled over for violations of any kind. After the boy's death, readers flooded The Albuquerque Journal with emails assailing local authorities after having witnessed [lawless driving](#) on a daily basis.

Steve Shackley, 72, said he had not seen more than a couple of traffic stops during the 16 years he has been in the city. "People do what they want when there's almost no enforcement," said Mr. Shackley, a professor emeritus of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley.

Aggressive drivers occasionally get caught. In October, the police arrested a 26-year-old man who was reportedly intoxicated, carrying a handgun and driving at a [speed of 140 miles per hour](#) on one of the city's main avenues.

Street racing is another problem. When a woman was arrested in 2020 after killing a pedestrian on Central Avenue, her boyfriend told officers they were [racing home in separate vehicles](#), "a game in their relationship," according to a court filing. In another recent tragedy, sheriff's deputies said the driver of a Ford pickup truck was street racing at 90 miles per hour when he [slammed into a car](#) pulling out of a Roman Catholic abbey, killing a 35-year-old priest.

Across the country, overall traffic fatalities — not just crashes killing pedestrians — are also rising at a record pace. Nearly 32,000 people were killed in vehicle crashes in the first nine months of 2021, a 12 percent increase from the same period in 2020, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. It was the [highest number of fatalities](#) during the first nine months of any year since 2006 and the highest percentage increase during the first nine months in the reporting system's history.

In the crash that killed Pronoy, the driver was at the helm of an all-terrain vehicle. Such vehicles are illegal on Albuquerque streets but are still commonly seen around the city. Video footage showed the driver, Sergio Almanza, drinking at a bar before the crash.

Pronoy's mother, Dr. Deepshikha Nag Chowdhury, a gastroenterologist at an Albuquerque hospital, publicly pleaded with authorities to find the driver in the weeks that followed. After fleeing the scene and going into hiding, Mr. Almanza surrendered to U.S. Marshals on Jan. 31.

Mr. Bhattacharya, who immigrated to the United States from India two decades ago, suffered a facial fracture in addition to losing his son. He said the crash had also shattered some of his long-held views. "It's ironic that I told so many friends how crossing the street was so safe in the United States compared with India," said Mr. Bhattacharya, who works in information technology. "I always thought we'd be safer here."

Albuquerque's police chief, Harold Medina, was blunt in assessing the situation. With the department also facing a surge in homicides and an increase in armed robbery cases, he contended resources and personnel were spread thin at a time when tempers were flaring.

"We're seeing erratic behavior in the way people are acting and their patience levels," Chief Medina said in an interview. "Everybody's been pushed. This is one of the most stressful times in memory."

In addition to more aggressive driving, Chief Medina cited an increase in drunken driving and a growing homeless population as other factors, explaining that some pedestrians killed in the city were living on the street.

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| | <p>Still, Chief Medina insisted the situation was changing. Following Pronoy's death, he said the department was bolstering enforcement, issuing more than 4,600 traffic citations in January compared with about 3,450 the same month a year ago.</p> <p>Ava Montoya, a spokeswoman for Mayor Tim Keller, said Albuquerque was improving traffic enforcement and initiating several measures, including improved lighting and the use of mobile speed enforcement devices and radar-equipped speed vans.</p> <p>Still, while leaders in Albuquerque and other cities seek fixes, others following pedestrian fatalities around the country are expressing alarm over the endurance of pandemic-related factors.</p> <p>Art Markman, a cognitive scientist at the University of Texas at Austin, said that such emotions partly reflected "two years of having to stop ourselves from doing things that we'd like to do."</p> <p>"We're all a bit at the end of our rope on things," Dr. Markman said. "When you get angry in the car, it generates energy — and how do you dissipate that energy? Well, one way is to put your foot down a little bit more on the accelerator."</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Wisconsin: gunman wounds 5; kills self |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/nation/police-gunman-in-racine-shoots-wounds-5-people-kills-self/ |
| GIST | <p>RACINE, Wis. (AP) — A man shot and wounded five people in a southeastern Wisconsin city early Sunday then killed himself as police closed in, authorities said.</p> <p>Officers responding to reports of shots fired around 2 a.m. in downtown Racine saw people fleeing and encountered a man with a gun, the Racine Police Department said in a statement.</p> <p>After a brief foot chase, police negotiated with the man for several minutes, but he turned the gun on himself. No officers fired their weapons, police said.</p> <p>Three shooting victims were taken to a local hospital, and two more turned up at hospitals in different cities, police said. Four of the victims were male and one was female. None appeared to have life-threatening injuries.</p> <p>Police provided no information about the identity of the shooter or his victims or the relationships between them, but said the shootings appeared to be domestic-related.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/13 CBP confronts fentanyl border smuggling |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/02/13/fentanyl-smuggling-border-scanning-technology/ |
| GIST | <p>LAREDO, Tex. — At the busiest commercial border crossing in North America, trucks stream into the United States at a rate of 500 per hour during peak times. Drug traffickers play the percentages.</p> <p>Fewer than 5 percent of the vehicles are typically screened by U.S. Customs and Border Protection with the powerful high-energy scanners that can peer deep inside cargo loads to detect "anomalies" — odd patterns or suspicious densities that could be illegal drugs. The inspections require drivers to leave their vehicles and endure delays.</p> <p>With fatal drug overdose deaths in the United States soaring to record levels, Congress has directed CBP to come up with a plan to scan 100 percent of arriving vehicles. Here and across the U.S. southern border, the agency is preparing to roll out new "nonintrusive" inspection systems to screen significantly more trucks.</p> |

These “multi-energy portals” will zap the cargo areas with high-energy waves, but use safer low-energy screening for the cab, allowing the drivers to remain in their vehicles and clear inspection faster, the agency says.

“It’s going to be a game changer for us,” said Alberto Flores, the CBP director for the Laredo port of entry, who said each machine can scan eight times as many trucks per hour as the existing high-energy systems.

“With the more scans we do, the probability of a seizure will increase,” Flores said.

Laredo is the front line in the U.S. government’s long and often demoralizing effort to stop illegal drugs at the border. U.S. Interstate 35 runs from here all the way to Duluth, Minn., right up the middle of the United States. For long-haul trucking, it is the highway equivalent of the Mississippi River, a central artery into the American heartland.

The Mexican trafficking organizations that hide narcotics in commercial loads use I-35 no differently than Walmart or Samsung or Ford. Once the drugs get past CBP here in Laredo, their distribution routes are wide open. The entire contiguous United States is within a 1½-day drive.

CBP’s Laredo field office seized 588 pounds of the powerful synthetic opioid fentanyl during the 2021 fiscal year, an eleven-fold increase over the 50 pounds detected in 2020.

More than 100,000 Americans are dying each year from drug overdoses, and most of those fatalities are linked to fentanyl. Overdoses from fentanyl have become the leading cause of death for Americans ages 18 to 45, according to the latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A new study by Stanford University and the Lancet medical journal projects U.S. opioid deaths will reach 1.22 million this decade if no new action is taken.

The advent of fentanyl has posed the biggest challenge yet to the government’s conventional interdiction methods, including border inspections. The same thing that makes fentanyl so deadly — its potency — allows for its exceedingly compact size.

Smugglers use false vehicle panels, hidden compartments and bulk produce shipments to hide drugs. Gas tanks, engines and batteries can be adapted with secret chambers. The drivers may have no idea they’re ferrying drugs, so there’s limited value in officers looking for behavioral cues such as nervousness.

“It is a cat-and-mouse game,” said Flores. “We will adjust with the cartels just as they adjust to the way we do inspections.”

Flores and other CBP officials insist their detection efforts are not futile. Every narcotics seizure takes dangerous drugs off the streets, saving lives, they say. In recent years, CBP has boosted the percentage of rail cars it scans to 100 percent, and the agency views commercial trucks as the next phase of a longer effort to deploy nonintrusive inspection technology for cargo as well as passenger vehicles at U.S. ports of entry.

Lawmakers in states with surging overdose deaths are pushing the government to go faster.

“A smuggler with multiple pounds of fentanyl, concealed in hidden compartments, needs to know that there is no chance of getting across our border without some kind of search,” Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio) said in a speech on the Senate floor this month.

“It’s not just a gap in our security, it’s a gaping hole in our security,” said Portman, whose home state has the fifth-highest number of drug overdose deaths per capita. “It’s resulting in lives being lost.”

CBP has started installing the multi-energy portals at the Brownsville, Tex., and Laredo ports of entry, part of a \$480 million effort to expand the technology along the U.S.-Mexico border. The agency said it is distributing information to truck drivers assuring them the technology is safe, and allowing drivers with concerns to opt out in favor of slower, traditional inspection procedures.

Gil Kerlikowske, a CBP commissioner under President Barack Obama who also previously ran the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, said more high-intensity scans at the border are a welcome addition, especially if they can occur without disruptions to trade. "The last thing you can do now is slow down shipping, given the past year and a half of supply chain issues," he said.

But, Kerlikowske cautioned, "we're not going to seize our way out of this issue. Every time we have new detection methods and better intelligence, we also have increased seizures, but increased seizures don't seem to be resulting in fewer deaths."

"In the long run, it's prevention that will make a difference," he said.

With overdose deaths soaring, DEA warns about fentanyl and meth-laced pills

Along with the scanning equipment, CBP is adding a new software program, CertScan, that officials also describe as a breakthrough. It is designed to streamline and centralize the growing amounts of data flooding the inspectors' monitors. In every border sector, CBP is planning to construct a central command center staffed by teams of "adjudicators" who will decide which trucks clear inspection and which ones should be subjected to a more thorough review by officers or K-9 teams.

The high-energy scans produce vivid 3D images of the vehicles and their cargo. In one control room at the port, veteran agents scrutinized a load of northbound water scooters, assembled in Mexico, which X-rays showed in intricate skeletal detail.

The adjudicators receive detailed manifest information about the trucks, their cargo and their drivers at least an hour in advance of a vehicle's arrival. Established companies and shippers with clean records are lower-risk; a truck with a random load or unfamiliar company tends to draw more scrutiny.

The system incorporates data from QR code readers, license plate recognition software, a radio frequency identification system, live cameras and links to DHS databases. The CertScan program gives adjudicators a single portal to all of this information and the imagery from the multi-energy screening.

"Running them all within this platform allows you to increase your inspection percentage significantly" without a major increase in staffing, said Jonathan Fleming, a former Transportation Security Administration official whose company, S2 Global, developed the software.

"Are you going to catch everything? No," he said. "But I think you can do a very good job of significantly expanding your interdiction capability at a traditional port of entry with these technologies deployed."

The government is racing to catch up to the fast-moving North American drug trade. The legalization of cannabis in some U.S. states has crashed demand for Mexican-grown bulk marijuana, driving traffickers toward hard narcotics. Cocaine seizures at the Laredo port of entry doubled last year, and CBP seized more than 190,000 pounds of meth in total at U.S. borders, nearly three times the amount confiscated in 2018.

"The honest truth is there's no way to completely stop flow of illegal drugs as long as demand in the United States is high," said Eric Olson, a global fellow at the Wilson Center in Washington who has tracked border security and drug trafficking issues for decades.

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| | <p>“The technology solutions to finding a half-ton of marijuana or bulk shipments of cocaine might be solvable, but when you’re talking about something like fentanyl that can be brought over in such small conveyances, it’s really hard to think it’ll have much success.”</p> <p>“I’m not saying it’s pointless, but it’s not a panacea either,” said Olson. With more scrutiny on commercial cargo, traffickers will probably pivot to passenger vehicles, maritime routes, cross-border tunnels and other smuggling tactics, he said.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Olympia explosion, fire, standoff then arrest |
| SOURCE | https://www.q13fox.com/news/suspect-taken-into-custody-following-explosion-standoff-in-olympia |
| GIST | <p>OLYMPIA, Wash. - It was a wild Saturday morning as people in Olympia woke up to an explosion, fire and the SWAT team in their apartment complex.</p> <p>It all came to an end as investigators took a suspect into custody and carried him out on a stretcher.</p> <p>Neighbors witnessed it all for more than six hours.</p> <p>They said they had a rude wake-up call at about 3 a.m.</p> <p>Now, they're just relieved it is over.</p> <p>"Very quick. About 30 seconds or more, so we were out," neighbor Patti Sievert said.</p> <p>For Sievert, this was a weekend morning unlike any other.</p> <p>"I just grabbed slippers. I had pants on the bed already. Threw them on, grabbed my coat, and I'm still in full pajamas," she said.</p> <p>Sievert and others at the Bayview Arms Apartments in Olympia were startled awake well before sunrise at about 3 a.m., forced to leave their pets and belongings behind.</p> <p>They described an explosion, smoke and flames prompting the fire department to respond.</p> <p>Eventually, the Thurston County SWAT team and Olympia police were at their neighbor's door.</p> <p>Fire officials said he barricaded himself inside with a knife.</p> <p>"There's been issues here since this person moved in, but I'm smelling burning, and then I heard yelling," neighbor Scott Edwards said.</p> <p>Edwards was right alongside Sievert and their neighbors who decided to wait it out in the parking lot.</p> <p>Some were in a bus nearby seeking warmth.</p> <p>For those so close to the SWAT activity, loud booms from flash bangs and the sounds of shattered glass were a reminder of just how tense things became.</p> <p>"For me, they're doing their job which is kind of refreshing because some of the things, I believe they get a bad rap," Edwards said.</p> <p>After more than six hours of people standing, watching and worrying, the SWAT team finally made their way into the unit coming out with a person on a stretcher who was moving and appearing to be responsive.</p> <p>It was the end to a scene witnesses said shattered their nerves.</p> |

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| | <p>"I would say thank you because you're saving our lives as well as everybody else," Sievert said.</p> <p>Neighbors said this has not happened before, and they're hoping it does not happen again.</p> <p>We've reached out to a spokesperson for Olympia police and the Thurston County Sheriff's Office for more information about the person involved in the standoff, but so far have not heard back.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Threat halts Mexico avocado imports to US |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/business/us-suspends-mexican-avocado-imports-on-eve-of-super-bowl/ |
| GIST | <p>MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico has acknowledged that the U.S. government has suspended all imports of Mexican avocados after a U.S. plant safety inspector in Mexico received a threat.</p> <p>The surprise, temporary suspension was confirmed late Saturday on the eve of the Super Bowl, the biggest sales opportunity of the year for Mexican avocado growers — though it would not affect game-day consumption since those avocados had already been shipped.</p> <p>Avocado exports are the latest victim of the drug cartel turf battles and extortion of avocado growers in the western state of Michoacan, the only state in Mexico fully authorized to export to the U.S. market.</p> <p>The U.S. government suspended all imports of Mexican avocados “until further notice” after a U.S. plant safety inspector in Mexico received a threatening message, Mexico’s Agriculture Department said in a statement.</p> <p>“U.S. health authorities ... made the decision after one of their officials, who was carrying out inspections in Uruapan, Michoacan, received a threatening message on his official cellphone,” the department wrote.</p> <p>The import ban came on the day that the Mexican avocado growers and packers association unveiled its Super Bowl ad for this year. Mexican exporters have taken out the pricey ads for almost a decade in a bid to associate guacamole as a Super Bowl tradition.</p> <p>This year’s ad shows Julius Caesar and a rough bunch of gladiator fans outside what appears to be the Colosseum, soothing their apparently violent differences by enjoying guacamole and avocados.</p> <p>The association did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the ban, which hits an industry with almost \$3 billion in annual exports. However, avocados for this year’s Super Bowl had already been exported in the weeks prior to the event.</p> <p>The U.S. Embassy wrote that “facilitating the export of Mexican avocados to the U.S. and guaranteeing the safety of our agricultural inspection personnel go hand in hand.”</p> <p>“We are working with the Mexican government to guarantee security conditions that would allow our personnel in Michoacan to resume operations,” the embassy wrote in its social media accounts.</p> <p>Because the United States also grows avocados, U.S. inspectors work in Mexico to ensure exported avocados don’t carry diseases that could hurt U.S. crops.</p> <p>It was only in 1997 that the U.S. lifted a ban on Mexican avocados that had been in place since 1914 to prevent a range of weevils, scabs and pests from entering U.S. orchards.</p> <p>The inspectors work for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services.</p> |

It is not the first time that the violence in Michoacan — where the Jalisco cartel is fighting turf wars against a collection of local gangs known as the United Cartels — has threatened avocados, the state's most lucrative crop.

After a previous incident in 2019, the USDA had warned about the possible consequences of attacking or threatening U.S. inspectors.

In August 2019, a U.S. Department of Agriculture team of inspectors was “directly threatened” in Ziracuaretiro, a town just west of Uruapan. While the agency didn't specify what happened, local authorities say a gang robbed the truck the inspectors were traveling in at gunpoint.

The USDA wrote in a letter at the time that, “For future situations that result in a security breach, or demonstrate an imminent physical threat to the well-being of APHIS personnel, we will immediately suspend program activities.”

Many avocado growers in Michoacan say drug gangs threaten them or their family members with kidnapping or death unless they pay protection money, sometimes amounting to thousands of dollars per acre.

On September 30, 2020, a Mexican employee of APHIS was killed near the northern border city of Tijuana.

Mexican prosecutors said Edgar Flores Santos was killed by drug traffickers who may have mistaken him for a policeman and a suspect was arrested. The U.S. State Department said investigations “concluded this unfortunate incident was a case of Mr. Flores being in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

The avocado ban was just the latest threat to Mexico's export trade stemming from the government's inability to rein in illegal activities.

On Thursday, the U.S. Trade Representative's Office filed an environmental complaint against Mexico for failing to stop illegal fishing to protect the critically endangered vaquita marina, the world's smallest porpoise.

The office said it had asked for “environment consultations” with Mexico, the first such case it has filed under the U.S.-Mexico-Canada free trade pact. Consultations are the first step in the dispute resolution process under the trade agreement, which entered into force in 2020. If not resolved, it could eventually lead to trade sanctions.

Mexico's government has largely abandoned attempts to enforce a fishing-free zone around an area where the last few vaquitas are believed to live in the Gulf of California, also known as the Sea of Cortez. Nets set illegally for another fish, the totoaba, drown vaquitas.

And on Monday, Mexican fishing boats in the Gulf of Mexico were “prohibited from entering U.S. ports, will be denied port access and services,” the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said, in response to years of Mexican boats illegally poaching red snapper in U.S. waters in the Gulf.

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| HEADLINE | 02/14 NPA: 13 officers wounded, 2 fatally in 24hrs |
| SOURCE | https://www.foxnews.com/us/war-on-cops-24-hours-police-officers-wounded-killed |
| GIST | Two police officers died and 11 others were wounded in shootings over a 24-hour period across four states Friday. "This is what we call the war on cops," Betsy Brantner Smith, spokeswoman for the National Police Association and a 29-year police veteran who trains officers, told Fox News Digital. |

"[W]e are constantly attacked, and we are either attacked doing very simple things — traffic stop, responding to a 911 call, a domestic. All of that."

The incidents happened in Arizona, Maryland, New Mexico and Pennsylvania. Here are some details:

Arizona: 9 officers shot

[Nine police officers](#), including two who later died, were wounded during a Friday morning shootout in Phoenix while responding to a domestic dispute. Police initially responded to a report of a woman shot at a home in the area of 51st Avenue and Elwood Street. The now-detained suspect invited the officers inside before allegedly opening fire and striking one of the officers multiple times, police officials said.

Maryland: 2 police officers shot

Later Friday afternoon, [two police officers](#) were shot and wounded in Frederick, Maryland, while responding to calls of a suspicious person. The suspect was also shot during the incident, and Maryland officials transported him to a nearby hospital.

New Mexico: 1 state trooper shot

A New Mexico State Police officer was also shot and wounded Friday afternoon while pursuing a vehicle that rammed into his police vehicle.

Pennsylvania: 1 SWAT officer shot

On Friday evening, a [Philadelphia SWAT officer](#) was shot while serving a drug warrant at an apartment building. A suspect inside the apartment allegedly fired two shots through the wall, striking the lead officer in his body armor, [FOX 29](#) Philadelphia reported.

[More police officers](#) were killed in the line of duty in 2021 than any previous year since 1995. While officer line-of-duty deaths reached record highs beginning in 2020 due to COVID-19, killings of officers are also up, according to the FBI's law enforcement officers killed in action (LEOKA) data.

59% increase

In 2021, the FBI counted [73](#) officers intentionally killed in the line of duty. That's a nearly 59% increase compared to the [46](#) intentionally killed in 2020.

The last time more than 72 officers were killed was in [1995](#), when 74 officers were intentionally killed on the job, according to LEOKA data. The next highest number of officers intentionally killed on duty was 72 in 2011, according to [LEOKA data](#) analyzed in a report by the [Heartland Institute](#).

That number was 55 in 2012; 27 in 2013; 51 in 2014; 41 in 2015; 66 in 2016; 46 in 2017; 56 in 2018; and 48 in 2019.

While American law enforcement officers "have always known" the risk of putting on a badge, nearly two years of anti-police rhetoric is not helping police or criminals, Brantner Smith said.

"When you constantly tell people that this one entity — somebody in a blue or a bright green uniform — is dangerous to you and that you should resist them, of course we're going to have increased attacks on law enforcement," she explained. "And, unfortunately, not only has it become a big media issue, but it's become a huge political issue."

Progressive policies to blame?

Brantner Smith and former New York City Police Commissioner Howard Safir pointed to progressive bail reform and prosecution policies that have allowed repeat offenders to be released from prison and back into their communities without vetting.

"The message that politicians and district attorneys have been sending to criminals is you can commit crimes with impunity," Safir said. "And since they're not doing stop, question and frisk anymore, criminals

are emboldened to carry guns now that they would not have before. And it's just a downward cycle into chaos."

Violent crime in general across major U.S. cities has increased over the past two years.

Murders up 44%

Murders across 22 major U.S. cities increased 44% in 2021 compared to 2019 and 5% compared to 2020. There were 218 more [murders](#) in the 22 cities in 2021, according to [updated findings](#) from the Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ), a nonpartisan criminal justice policy organization.

As for other forms of violent crime, CCJ reported an 8% increase in gun assaults, a 4% rise in aggravated assaults and a 1% surge in [robbery](#) rates after robberies dropped in 2020. The organization noted reports of carjackings and train robberies that became more prevalent in 2021. Domestic violence also increased 4% since 2020 in 11 cities.

The violent crime on top of anti-police rhetoric is making officers in those cities want to move to smaller departments or leave law enforcement entirely, Branter Smith said. As a result, some of the largest departments in the country are experiencing [staffing shortages](#), which, in turn, makes it more difficult for officers to respond to calls and combat crime.

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| HEADLINE | 02/14 LA Super Bowl celebrations get out of hand |
| SOURCE | https://www.cbsnews.com/news/super-bowl-celebrations-rowdy-la/ |
| GIST | <p>Police issued numerous dispersal orders for parts of downtown Los Angeles Sunday night as celebrations of the Rams' Super Bowl victory began to get out of hand, CBS Los Angeles reports.</p> <p>A station helicopter, over one of the large crowds of people on streets, spotted people setting off fireworks in the middle of traffic. Roman candles were also in the mix. City buses were vandalized. Some looting was reported, and at least one person was shot.</p> <p>Police tweeted that they "continue to see large, violent and destructive crowds in the Downtown LA core area. Those involved in criminal activity, and those failing to obey dispersal orders, are subject to arrest." There was no word on whether any arrests were made.</p> <p>Someone was shot, apparently in the legs, at a celebration on a street in East L.A., CBS L.A. said, adding that the victim was conscious.</p> <p>Authorities asked that a drone show conducted by the NFL over the Los Angeles Convention Center be stopped, CBS L.A. said.</p> <p>Los Angeles Police Department officers began to try to break up the crowds at about 9:15 p.m. LAPD policy doesn't permit officers to use tear gas or any type of gas for crowd dispersal – only foam projectiles. As officers continued to attempt to clear city streets, fans could be seen vandalizing city property like Metro buses – spray painting "Go Rams" on the windshield of one bus.</p> <p>Video on social media also showed several members of the crowd looting various stores on some intersections, CBS L.A. added.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Albuquerque stabbing spree; 11 injured |
| SOURCE | https://www.abqjournal.com/2469751/several-people-stabbed-on-central-apd-says.html |
| GIST | A man is in custody in connection with a stabbing spree Sunday that started in Downtown, stretched across the city, and left 11 people injured. |

No one was killed but at least two people were in critical condition after the attacks, according to Gilbert Gallegos, an Albuquerque Police Department spokesman.

Gallegos said that around 11 a.m. a person was stabbed outside of Sister Bar on Central in Downtown, which was apparently the first in the series of stabbings, most of which took place along Central.

All told, police said they are investigating seven scenes where people were stabbed in apparently random attacks. One of the scenes was a homeless encampment.

“There doesn’t seem to be any rhyme or reason,” Gallegos said during a news conference Sunday evening.

Police took the man into custody near Lomas and Wyoming NE. The man had a knife near him at the time he was arrested, Gallegos said. Authorities have not released his name or said what charges he may face.

In the first stabbing, outside of Sister Bar, a man suffered a cut to the hand.

“The offender was reported to be riding a small BMX bike, and armed with a large knife,” Gallegos said in an email.

Just after noon, a caller reported that a person had been stabbed in the arm near Central and Yale. And at about 1 p.m., police received a call reporting that a man had been attacked on the sidewalk in front of the Sundowner Apartments on Central near San Pedro.

At 1:54 p.m., a man was reportedly stabbed in the neck close to Central and Pennsylvania, and minutes later, a caller reported an offender was trying to stab customers at the Circle K near Central and Wyoming.

“Officers showed up immediately and discovered multiple stabbing victims,” Gallegos said.

Around the same time, a stabbing was reported near Central and Vermont.

“Another victim was stabbed by an offender on a bike in the area of (Wyoming and Domingo NE) outside of a restaurant,” Gallegos said.

Gallegos said the victims’ injuries ranged from superficial wounds to more serious injuries. Several people were taken to four different hospitals, he said, and all were reported to be in stable condition by Sunday evening.

Rob, who didn’t want to give his last name, said he was held up by the suspect near Wyoming and Central, shortly before the man was taken into custody.

“He was talking crazy, he was angry about something,” said Rob, who wasn’t hurt. “As soon as he dropped the bike he pulled his blade out.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 Charlotte bus driver fatally shot; road rage? |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/US/road-rage-investigated-fatal-shooting-charlotte-bus-driver/story?id=82860864 |
| GIST | <p>A Charlotte, North Carolina, city bus driver has died after being shot while at the wheel and on his route with passengers aboard in what police are investigating as a possible road rage incident, authorities said.</p> <p>Ethan Rivera, 41, a driver for the Charlotte Area Transit System, died at a hospital Saturday night, a day after being shot while operating a bus in a busy area of uptown Charlotte, police said.</p> <p>No arrests have been announced as of Sunday as Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police homicide detectives combed through surveillance video and urged witnesses to come forward with information that could help identify the shooter.</p> |

Rivera was on his route about 9:30 p.m. Friday when he was shot while stopped at a red light, authorities said. Police sources told ABC affiliate WSOC-TV in Charlotte that investigators are looking into whether the shooting is linked to a road-rage altercation with a motorist.

Police officers found the bus veered off the road with the mortally wounded driver still in his seat.

Four passengers aboard the bus were not injured, police said.

Rivera's co-workers told WSOC that the shooting has left them upset and fearful for their own lives.

"We worry every day. We worry and we pray that we make it home the same way we made it to work," said one driver, who asked not to be identified.

Another city driver said of Rivera, "He was a good co-worker. I think he's been in Charlotte less than two years, but every time you saw him, he was always smiling. Always smiling."

The shooting came just two days after a school bus operator in Minneapolis was shot in the head while driving home three children. None of the children were injured and the driver is expected to survive, police said.

No arrests have been made in the Minneapolis shooting and police are investigating whether the driver was targeted or struck by a stray bullet, authorities said.

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| HEADLINE | 02/13 FBI: \$10,000 reward 'Route 91 bandit' |
| SOURCE | https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/13/us/fbi-bank-robber-route-91/index.html |
| GIST | <p>(CNN)The Federal Bureau of Investigation is asking for the public's help in locating a man nicknamed the "Route 91 Bandit," who they say is responsible for at least 11 bank robberies in New England over the past five months.</p> <p>The robberies all took place at banks along US Route 91, the north-south interstate highway that stretches from New Haven, Connecticut, to the US-Canada border.</p> <p>The first robbery happened on September 9, 2021, at Arrha Credit Union in West Springfield, Massachusetts, and the most recent robbery was on January 27 at Franklin First Federal Credit Union in Greenfield, Massachusetts. In between, the robber hit banks as far south as Liberty Bank in Avon, Connecticut, and as far north as the Savings Bank of Walpole in Keene, New Hampshire.</p> <p>The serial bank robber is described as a White man between 5 foot 6 inches and 5 foot 8 inches in height, with of medium build, with blue eyes and light-colored hair, typically wearing a hood or hat and white sneakers. The man has allegedly threatened to use a firearm, and he attempted to enter the bank vault during six of the robberies, the FBI said. He may be driving a newer model Nissan sedan, according to investigators.</p> <p>One of the videos released by the FBI shows the suspect wearing a black sweatshirt reading "Post University" and the words "No Hall Like Ohall 2016-2017" on the back during the robbery on November 5 in Athol, Massachusetts.</p> <p>In the video, which has no sound, the suspect enters the bank at 3:18 p.m. and presents a piece of paper to a bank employee sitting in an office. The suspect then corrals three bank employees into a back room, the video shows. They then return to an office and the employees hand the suspect two wads of cash before he departs out of the front door at 3:23 p.m.</p> |

The agency is offering a reward of up to \$10,000 for information leading to his identification, arrest and conviction.

"In the interest of public safety, we're asking anyone with information about this individual to contact us immediately. We need to put a stop to this man's crime spree before someone gets hurt," said Joseph R. Bonavolonta, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Boston Division. "He's considered armed and dangerous so please take a close look at these images and reach out to us if you know who he is."

Here's the full list of banks the man robbed, according to the FBI:

- September 9, 2021, at around 10:21 a.m., Arrha Credit Union, 63 Park Ave., West Springfield, Massachusetts.
- September 20, 2021, at around 11:50 a.m., American Eagle Credit Union 201 Elm St., Enfield, Connecticut.
- October 4, 2021, at around 4:50 p.m., People's United Bank, 479 Canal St., Brattleboro, Vermont.
- October 15, 2021, at around 10:45 a.m., Webster Bank, 2 North Road, East Windsor, Connecticut.
- October 22, 2021, at around 11:45 a.m., Webster Bank, 637 Main St., Somers, Connecticut.
- November 5, 2021, at around 3:18 p.m., Workers Credit Union, 107 Tower Road, Athol, Massachusetts.
- November 19, 2021, at around 4:42 p.m., Liberty Bank, 27 Dale Road, Avon, Connecticut.
- November 20, 2021, at around 8:46 a.m., Savings Bank of Walpole, 400 West St., Keene, New Hampshire.
- December 16, 2021, at around 11:48 a.m., Greenfield Cooperative Bank, 176 Avenue A, Montague, New Hampshire.
- January 6, 2022, at around 10:50 a.m., Keystone Bank, 122 Prospect Hill Road, East Windsor, Connecticut.
- January 27, 2022, at around 5:52 p.m., Franklin First Federal Credit Union, 57 Newton Street, Greenfield, Massachusetts.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Hertz claims thousands of renters steal cars |
| SOURCE | https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/2022/02/11/hertz-customers-car-theft/ |
| GIST | <p>Some spent days in jail, others months. One woman alleges she was arrested more than two years after she returned the vehicle she was accused of absconding with. All claim that the rental company Hertz reported them to police for stealing cars they had properly paid for.</p> <p>Now Hertz has to publicize its number of theft accusations. In a ruling Wednesday, a federal judge in Delaware sided with the request from attorneys for 230 customers who say they were wrongly arrested.</p> <p>The total still depends on whom you ask. Hertz said it reports to police 0.014 percent of its 25 million annual rental transactions — or 3,500 customers. Attorneys for the renters said they believe the number is closer to 8,000.</p> <p>Francis Alexander Malofiy, one of those lawyers, said Hertz's tendency to report missing cars to police without investigating first is unacceptable, either way.</p> <p>"This is not a question of if it's happening. It's a question of how many people it's happening to," he said Friday in an interview.</p> <p>Hertz, which has been battling these allegations since 2019, maintains that it only reports renters to police after "exhaustive attempts" to reach them.</p> <p>"The vast majority of these cases involve renters who were many weeks or even months overdue returning vehicles and who stopped communicating with us well beyond the scheduled due date," the company said in a statement.</p> |

At several points in the [coronavirus](#) pandemic, securing a rental car has resembled a nightmare, even absent potentially false theft allegations. Car shortages have made customers [desperate for vehicles](#) as prices soared in tandem.

Hertz, specifically, has faced additional problems: It emerged from bankruptcy in June months after getting hit with a lawsuit alleging it had [withheld a time-stamped receipt](#) that could prove a man innocent of murder. Then, in a viral Twitter thread, a different customer posted a scathing letter she had written to the company to complain about her “Kafkaesque customer service” experience.

On Thursday, Julius Burnside described what he said was his experience renting a car from Hertz in 2017. “Turned it in, paid for it, kept my receipts, went about my life, found out there was a warrant for my arrest and subsequently went to jail,” [he told MSNBC](#).

Other people told “Inside Edition” that they were similarly arrested after Hertz accused them of stealing cars they had paid for. A charge of felony auto theft against Paul-Anthony Knight was ultimately dismissed, the TV program reported, but not before he served jail time.

“I was thrown to the ground, I was arrested and I was locked up for over a week,” Knight, of the Atlanta area, [told “Inside Edition” last month](#).

Colorado resident Drew Seaser [told CBS News](#) he was stopped by customs officers at an airport and informed there was a warrant for his arrest in Georgia, where Hertz alleged he had stolen a rental car. Seaser said he had never been to Georgia or rented a vehicle from Hertz.

Those kinds of false theft allegations have not abated, attorneys for the customers said.

“Despite active litigation on false-police-report claims, Hertz customers continue to be arrested and that ‘tiny fraction’ continues to grow,” the lawyers wrote in court filings, citing [previous comments from a company lawyer](#) that a “tiny fraction” of customers is wrongfully arrested.

The problem sometimes arises when Hertz cannot find one of its cars in a physical parking lot or its computer system, Malofiy said. So, he said, the company reports the vehicle missing.

Other times, Malofiy said, the confusion is caused by a customer swapping cars during their rental period or extending the time frame. If the credit or debit card charge fails to process correctly, he said Hertz’s system generates a theft report.

Malofiy said the company does not update its police reports if a payment ultimately processes — leaving customers to flounder in the criminal justice system. In 2020, a spokesperson for Hertz [told the Philadelphia Inquirer](#) that a stolen-vehicle report “was valid when it was made” and that it was “up to law enforcement to decide what to do with the case.”

The company’s method of dealing with missing cars amounts to offloading responsibility for its inventory to taxpayer-funded law enforcement, Malofiy said.

“We’re having police act as a strong arm for private corporations and private vehicles,” he said, “when this is not what taxpayer dollars are supposed to be used for.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Philippines: 9 killed in ongoing feud |
| SOURCE | https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/02/12/Philippines-nine-killed-road-ambush/4121644701286/ |
| GIST | Feb. 12 (UPI) -- Nine people were killed and three were injured during an ambush Saturday in the Philippine province of Maguindanao, local authorities reported. |

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| | <p>Police and military officials believe the attack was the culmination of an ongoing feud between the families of two commanders of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces-Moro Islamic Liberation Front (BIAF-MILF), according to Filipino online news agency Rappler.</p> <p>Police believe the main target of the ambush was Peges Lentagi Mamasaing, the BIAF-MILF commander who goes by the name Black Magic. Mamasaing died along with eight others, including his sons Johari, Sadam and Sadr.</p> <p>The feuding group was allegedly led by Jordan Malalintang and his son Morsid, Maguindanao Police Captain Fayed Cana said. Malalintang is Mamasaing's cousin.</p> <p>Authorities are currently searching for the suspects.</p> <p>Midpantao Midtimbang Jr., mayor of the Guindulungan municipality, told the state-run Philippine News Agency that the ambush happened around 8 a.m. while the victims traveled on a narrow road in a remote area on their way to attend a celebratory banquet in the nearby village Barangay Kitapok.</p> <p>Responders found nine bodies sprawled on the ground and inside a Mitsubishi Montero and a Ford Ranger, along with three injured victims who were rushed to a hospital.</p> <p>Investigators told Rappler that empty shells found near the vehicles came from high-powered firearms such as M14 and M16 rifles.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 DOC: Covid outbreak rises at Yacolt prison |
| SOURCE | https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/covid-outbreak-climbs-at-washington-prison/ |
| GIST | <p>The Washington State Department of Corrections reported Friday there are 14 active COVID-19 cases among inmates and seven cases among staff at Larch Corrections Center.</p> <p>The minimum-security prison near Yacolt was placed on facility-wide outbreak status Monday after four inmates in the living unit tested positive. On Wednesday, the state reported there were six active cases among incarcerated individuals and eight cases among staff.</p> <p>Incarcerated individuals who test positive are being temporarily relocated to the Elkhorn Unit to help stop the virus's spread, according to the department.</p> <p>To date, 295 incarcerated individuals and 65 staff members have tested positive, according to the DOC. The majority of those cases came during an outbreak in late 2020, with more than 90 percent of the inmate population testing positive.</p> <p>In December, the most recent data available online, Larch's average daily population was 222, with a capacity of 240.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Italy mafia to businesses: pay or burn |
| SOURCE | https://www.wsj.com/articles/pay-or-burn-an-italian-mafias-message-to-businesses-11644681601 |
| GIST | <p>FOGGIA—On a November morning, Gianpaolo Romano found an unsigned letter under the glass entrance of his car showroom in this south Italian province known for its pristine beaches, vast tomato fields and, these days, a ruthless local mafia.</p> <p>The message said he had to pay €250,000, equivalent to \$286,000, to be safe. It didn't say to whom he had to pay the pizzo, or protection money, but that he should find them himself. They knew his habits and where his family lived, the letter said. It was the first time he had received such a demand.</p> |

Mr. Romano and his two brothers, who co-own the family business founded in 1964, decided not to pay, and to report the threat to the police.

At dawn on Jan. 4, a bomb mixing gunpowder with nails and bolts blew out all of the showroom's windows, badly damaged three cars on display, and left holes in the metal shutter of the store opposite.

"We don't regret reporting it, even though we don't feel safe now," Mr. Romano said.

The blast at Mr. Romano's showroom inaugurated a series of attacks previously unseen in the Foggia province, in the southern region of Puglia, the heel of the boot-shaped Italian peninsula.

Fourteen shops or businesses have suffered bomb or arson attacks since the start of this year, according to Foggia's anti-extortion association.

The wave of violence marks an attempt by Foggia's mafia to reassert its power, after a crackdown by Italian authorities in recent years led to the arrest of hundreds of local Mafiosi, said judicial officials and business owners.

The local mob, which has been active in the area for three decades, is often referred to as the Fourth Mafia, because it is smaller and less notorious than the Sicilian Cosa Nostra, the ['Ndrangheta from Calabria](#) or the Camorra from Naples.

Pending criminal trials in Foggia have grown to more than 12,000, compared with 9,700 four years ago, largely thanks to the authorities' mob crackdown, said Foggia's Chief Prosecutor Ludovico Vaccaro.

Puglia is one of the richer regions in southern Italy. But Foggia, with its mafia problem, is one of the poorest parts of Puglia.

Unemployment in Foggia runs at 25%, one of Italy's highest rates and roughly double the rest of Puglia. Many people have only seasonal jobs in tourism or the large tomato and wheat fields. The young often emigrate to Italy's wealthier north or abroad. Over the past 20 years, Foggia's population has declined by 13% to 600,000.

Extortion has been the local mob's mainstay, to the point that 80% of Foggia's business were believed until recently to be paying the pizzo, said Antonio Laronga, a Foggia magistrate and author of a book about the local mafia. Few ever report demands for protection money to the police, magistrates say.

"We even found that some entrepreneurs spontaneously contacted the mob and offered to pay," said Mr. Laronga.

But the Fourth Mafia also smuggles via Albania most of the marijuana that enters Italy, said Mr. Laronga, and has often robbed security vans on highways, armed with Kalashnikovs.

The Fourth Mafia suffered major setbacks beginning in 2017. In August that year, two local Mafiosi, including clan boss Mario Romito, were killed on a country road near the village of San Marco in Lamis by rival gangsters who drove up alongside their car and opened fire with Kalashnikovs. It was the latest in a string of killings in a feud between the Romito clan and the rival Li Bergolis family, according to Mr. Laronga.

Two farmers, who saw the August shooting and tried to run away, were pursued by the killers and shot dead.

The slaying of the two witnesses shocked the province and led to a crackdown by Italian authorities, including investigations by specialist anti-mafia prosecutors. A small number of Mafiosi turned informants, helping prosecutors to build their case, according to magistrates.

Hundreds of suspected mobsters were arrested in the following years, including 32 in December last year, on charges ranging from extortion and drugs and arms trafficking to membership in a mafia organization.

The arrests gave more local entrepreneurs the confidence to report attempts at extortion last year, compared with previous years, prosecutors said.

But the Fourth Mafia is fighting back. The wave of recent attacks on local businesses, showing a ferocity not seen before, show that the mob is trying to re-establish the climate of fear that allowed it to dominate the province for years, prosecutors and business owners say.

“I think it is a sign of their vitality,” said Foggia’s chief prosecutor, Mr. Vaccaro. “We have put a lot of pressure on them, but they are still very active. I am worried.”

Law enforcement in Foggia is chronically understaffed for the amount of crimes committed in the area, Mr. Vaccaro said. His team of 25 prosecutors needs more recruits, but it is hard to persuade people to apply for jobs here, he said.

In mid-January, as the bombings and arson attacks multiplied, Italy’s Interior Minister Luciana Lamorgese held an emergency meeting in Foggia with local police chiefs, prosecutors and business owners. “The state needs to make its presence felt in a strong, decisive and united way,” Ms. Lamorgese told the meeting. She promised to send an additional 50 police officers to Foggia.

Events leading up to mafia attacks often follow the same script.

First, business owners receive a demand for protection money. If they ignore or report it, then a few weeks later their business is burned down or bombed, according to Alessandro Zito, president of Foggia’s anti-extortion association, a group created in January to support entrepreneurs.

A hairdresser from the area said he received the first request for a €250,000 “insurance” payment in October. He ignored it, hoping it was a sick joke. A few days later, he received a second, identical written request.

In mid-January, a bomb exploded at the entrance of his hair salon, setting fire to furniture and hair sprays inside, and gutting the salon. Rebuilding it will cost up to €160,000, the owner estimated.

More entrepreneurs have reported mob threats to the police, but many others opt to keep quiet and pay the pizzo.

“I am sorry to say this, but people here have not been very collaborative,” said Mr. Vaccaro.

Farmer Lazzaro D’Auria is among those who refuse to bow to the mob.

In 2017, he said, he was alone in one of his tomato fields when he was surrounded by 10 Mafiosi. Over the previous two years he had repeatedly refused to meet the mafia’s demand for an annual pizzo of €200,000, Mr. D’Auria said.

The men threatened to harm him and his family, he said, but lowered their demand to €150,000 a year. He reported them to the police.

Since then he has lived under police protection. He testified in a trial, where five of the Mafiosi who threatened him were convicted. But the mob didn’t forget him. Over the past six years, he has suffered six bombings, 15 robberies and vandalism of his farm machinery, he said.

“In the beginning I thought about shutting the business,” Mr. D’Auria said, while three policemen in casual clothes watched over him from a few yards away. “But then I said to myself: Why on earth do I have to throw away everything I have created in 25 years?”

In some cases, the clans have attacked businesses with no warning or demand for money. Prosecutors say such tactics are part of the mob’s effort to show their power and reassert their control of the area.

“All the attacks are an advertising spot to show that they are still alive, still present, a sort of marketing tool,” said Mr. Laronga.

In other cases, minor vandalism sends a hint that an entrepreneur should seek out the mafia and pay for protection. Refusal is followed later by fire.

Such was the experience of Dario Melillo whose beach resort was destroyed by an arson attack in late January. The only previous hint that the mafia was targeting him emerged last summer, when someone cut holes in the resort’s plastic water tanks, he said. He reported it to the police.

“My only ambition was to be able to work in an honest way,” Mr. Melillo said, amid the still-smoking rubble of his beach resort. “This isn’t a message only for me, it is for everybody in this land.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Shoplifting reaches crisis proportions |
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| SOURCE | https://www.axios.com/shoplifting-retail-crisis-online-resale-9031ced5-04c9-4e88-84f8-1c93e39e7afd.html |
| GIST | <p>Shoplifting has gotten so bad nationally that chains like Rite Aid are closing hard-hit stores, sending terrified employees home in Ubers and locking up aisles of seemingly mundane items like deodorant and toothpaste.</p> <p>Why it matters: Retailers are already reeling from the pandemic, supply chain woes and the labor shortage. Now they're combating systematic looting by organized crime gangs — which are growing more aggressive and violent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "It's out of control — it is just out of control," Lisa LaBruno, SVP of operations and innovation at the Retail Industry Leaders Association, tells Axios.• A lot of the uptick is tied to the ease of reselling stolen goods online, plus the fact that consumers are buying more everyday goods online during COVID.• "We have experienced a 300% increase in retail theft from our stores since the pandemic began." CVS spokesman Michael DeAngelis tells Axios. <p>At a Rite Aid that just closed its doors in midtown Manhattan, more than \$200,000 in goods were stolen in December and January, per the New York Post.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “They come in every day, sometimes twice a day, with laundry bags and just load up on stuff,” the Post quoted a store employee saying. <p>Driving the news: The retail industry is pressing Congress to pass the INFORM Act, which would require online marketplaces (like Amazon, eBay and Facebook) to verify sellers and provide contact information to buyers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attorneys general in states like California, Arizona and New Mexico are setting up anti-shoplifting task forces and looking at stricter laws on bail reform and felony thresholds.• District attorneys in cities like Chicago and New York are considering harsher measures against shoplifters. <p>The big picture: The problem is made worse by flash mobs like the 80 people who stormed a Nordstrom in San Francisco in November, and organized retail crime groups that often hire homeless people and drug addicts as "boosters" to do the dirty work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Store shelves aren't the only places getting hit: Warehouses and cargo trucks are also in the crosshairs. |

- Teams of "boosters" will throng a store with laundry bags, grabbing what they can and assaulting workers who confront them — sometimes [fatally](#).

Details: One Bay Area crime ring [stole](#) \$8 million in merchandise from CVS, Walgreens and Target stores.

- [Another one](#) ripped off a staggering \$50 million in goods — mostly health and beauty products that thieves stockpiled in a warehouse.
- "More than \$1.6 million in razor blades alone were recovered," [per](#) Loss Prevention Magazine.

What stores are doing: In addition to locking high-theft items behind anti-theft panels, retailers are arming more merchandise with alarmed security tags.

- They're installing shelf sensors that can tell when a customer has been browsing for a suspiciously long time, and adding "smart" shopping carts with wheels that lock if someone sneaks it past the cash register.
- But too many locks can frustrate honest shoppers — potentially sending them into the arms of an Amazon.com instead of the corner store.
- LaBruno of the Retail Industry Leaders Association says merchants "are always doing a balancing act" to ward off theft while making inventory accessible.

Al Sharpton addressed the issue on "Morning Joe" on Thursday, saying, "They're locking up my toothpaste."

What they're saying: A [survey](#) released in December by the National Retail Federation found that designer clothing was the top item reported stolen, followed by laundry detergent, razors, designer handbags and deodorant.

- The top five cities for organized retail crime, in order, were Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, New York and San Francisco.

Yes, but: An [analysis of crime statistics](#) and other reporting by The Atlantic cast doubt on what it called the "great shoplifting freak-out," citing "fuzzy data" and asserting that what's being lumped together as shoplifting is actually a variety of violent crimes.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Police raid in Rio De Janeiro leaves 8 dead |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/police-raid-rio-de-janeiro-leaves-dead-82824582 |
| GIST | <p>RIO DE JANEIRO -- A police operation in a poor community in Rio de Janeiro on Friday left eight people dead, according to the state's military police.</p> <p>The raid in the Vila Cruzeiro favela was coordinated between Brazil's highway police and the military police. Officers seized automatic weapons, pistols, grenades and kilos of drugs, according to a statement from the military police.</p> <p>Local media reported that more than a dozen schools and some family health clinics closed because of the gunfire.</p> <p>One body was laid out on the street under a tarp, and a group of residents gathered nearby waiting to see if belonged to a relative or friend. Some protested against the operation, demanding to see the bodies of those who were killed.</p> <p>Friday's raid targeted criminals planning attacks against security forces occupying the Jacarezinho favela, and one person was detained, according to the statement. Jacarezinho is where the state has launched its so-called "Integrated City" initiative that seeks to reclaim territory controlled by gangs — and also the site of a raid last year that left more than two dozen people dead.</p> |

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| | <p>Earlier this month, Brazil's Supreme Court issued a ruling that forces Rio's state government to institute measures aimed at reducing police killings and violations of human rights, including the development of a plan within 90 days.</p> <p>The court also ruled that lethal force should only be used only in situations in which all other means have been exhausted and when necessary to protect life, and that police have 180 days to install devices to record audio and video on their uniforms and vehicles.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Philadelphia: 'very violent scene'; 6 stabbed |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/US/stabbed-violent-scene-philadelphia-home-critical-condition/story?id=82825008 |
| GIST | <p>Six people were stabbed in a Philadelphia home early Friday in what police are calling a "very violent scene."</p> <p>Police received a 911 call just after 4 a.m. reporting a stabbing and responding officers found the victims, Philadelphia Police Chief Inspector Scott Small told reporters.</p> <p>Three were hospitalized in critical condition and three were in stable condition, according to Philadelphia police.</p> <p>Small said there were two bloody knives and one of the knives "is actually broken, which goes to show how violently these individuals were being stabbed."</p> <p>The "very violent scene" was "all on the second floor in the three bedrooms of this private residence," Small said. "There's blood on the floor, there's blood on the walls, on the doors. The door to the master bedroom is completely knocked off its hinges."</p> <p>Police found the suspect "covered with blood" on a street and "he immediately surrendered," Small said.</p> <p>Police said the victims in critical condition were a 30-year-old woman stabbed multiple times in the back; a 32-year-old woman stabbed multiple times in the arms and chest; and a 49-year-old woman stabbed multiple times in the neck, head and back.</p> <p>In stable condition were a 26-year-old man stabbed in the chest and back; a 57-year-old man stabbed in the forehead; and a 55-year-old woman stabbed in arm, police said.</p> <p>So far there is no motive, Small said.</p> <p>The suspect was positively identified by some of the family members, including some of the victims, and was taken to a hospital to be treated for cuts to his hands, Small said.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Ambush: 5 Phoenix police officers shot |
| SOURCE | https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/phoenix-police-officers-ambushed-baby-safe-standoff-82824214 |
| GIST | <p>PHOENIX -- A man who shot his ex-girlfriend at a Phoenix home early Friday ambushed the first officer on the scene, seriously injuring him, then opened fire on other police as they tried to rescue a baby that was left outside the door.</p> <p>The woman later died. In all, five officers were shot, including four who were wounded while trying to take the baby to safety. Four more officers were injured by shrapnel or ricocheting bullets, police said.</p> <p>Of the five shot, four remain hospitalized. All of the officers were expected to survive, and the baby girl was unharmed.</p> |

"A baby is safe today because of our Phoenix police officers," Mayor Kate Gallego said at a news conference near the scene.

The most seriously injured officer was the first to arrive at the home, around 2:15 a.m., following a report of a woman shot. He was invited inside, Phoenix police Sgt. Andy Williams said.

"As he approached the doorway, the suspect ambushed him with a gun and shot him several times," he said. "That officer was able to get back and get away to safety."

Video from the scene shows another man coming outside holding a baby and a satchel. The man put the satchel on the ground and then laid down the infant, wrapped in a blanket, between the satchel and the front door. He raised his hands to surrender while backing away from the house.

After that man was detained, other officers approached the doorway to get the baby girl, and the suspect fired more shots. The police returned fire, which then led the suspect to barricade himself. Eight of the officers were wounded by ricocheting bullets or shrapnel in that exchange, Williams said.

Police were able to get the baby to safety as a SWAT unit took over.

The suspect remained barricaded for several hours and was later found dead from a gunshot wound inside the home.

Police also found the suspect's ex-girlfriend in the home. She had been shot and was critically injured, and she died hours later at a hospital, police said. Williams said the baby was believed to be the woman and suspect's child. She is now in state custody.

The man who brought the baby outside suffered non-life-threatening injuries. Williams said he's a family member and is cooperating with police.

"No information suggests that he's part of the ambush, but it's an ongoing investigation," Williams said.

Police identified the gunman as 36-year-old Morris Richard Jones III and said they were still trying to learn about the circumstances preceding the incident.

"This is just one more example of the dangers that officers face every day keeping us and our community safe," Police Chief Jeri Williams said at an early morning news conference. "If I seem upset, I am. This is senseless. It does not need to happen and it continues to happen over and over again."

Federal court records show Jones has a criminal history dating back to at least 2007, when he was sentenced in Oklahoma to seven years in prison for using a firearm during a drug trafficking crime and possessing a fire arm after a felony conviction.

Records also show Jones pleaded guilty in March 2020 to conspiring to transport, for profit, people who were in the country illegally near the San Simmons area in southeastern Arizona. He was sentenced to three years of probation. Prosecutor sought to revoke his probation because they say Jones used marijuana and cocaine in the spring of 2021 and punched his girlfriend in the face and took her gun.

In September, his probation was revoked, and he was sentenced to federal prison for five months

The middle-class neighborhood in southwest Phoenix where the shooting occurred has newly constructed stucco houses tightly packed together and sits next to large shipping and fulfillment facilities for businesses. The home had its second-story windows shot out.

Frank DeAguilar, its owner, said the residence is a rental and he didn't know anything about the people living there. He said a property management firm handles the details. "It's just a sad situation," he said.

Chris Grollnek, an active shooter expert, told The Associated Press that it's important to know how the incident was initially reported. Was it a 911 call from the woman pleading for help? A neighbor reporting gunfire and screaming?

The immediate information would determine how the first officers respond as they get to the scene, he said.

Traditionally, a barricaded suspect buys the police time to set up a perimeter and call a SWAT team, which could take 20 minutes to arrive. But if someone is injured inside, "the human factor takes over," Grollnek said. "I'm the first one there, I'm going in."

Charles "Sid" Heal, former commanding officer of Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's SWAT unit, said department policies often give the decision-making authority to the responding officer.

Both Heal and Grollnek described firing on officers who are trying to save a baby as "evil." They said police protocols simply cannot cover such a scenario.

"Hopefully it doesn't happen often enough that we'll ever have a protocol for it," Heal said.

He added he cannot imagine a situation where the officers would have left the baby exposed because it was too dangerous for them to rescue the child.

"The moral factors far exceed the physical risk," he said.

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Suspects in Pa. party shooting sue police |
| SOURCE | https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/12/us/robert-thomas-cheron-selton-wilkinsburg-lawsuit.html |
| GIST | <p>One night, at a barbecue in Wilksburg, Pa., near Pittsburgh in 2016, a gunman fired at the partygoers, driving them to a house's back porch, where a second gunman picked off victims with an assault-style rifle. They killed five people, including a woman eight months pregnant, in what the police called a methodically planned massacre.</p> <p>Investigators quickly arrested two men, Robert Thomas and Cheron Selton, charged them with six counts of criminal homicide and kept them in detention for four years while awaiting trial.</p> <p>But on Feb. 3, 2020, on the first day of trial, prosecutors dismissed the charges against Mr. Thomas, citing a lack of evidence against him. Mr. Selton was acquitted less than two weeks later at trial.</p> <p>Now, both men are accusing the police in Allegheny County of misconduct, saying they relied on three confidential informants even though their statements contradicted the evidence.</p> <p>Mr. Thomas, 33, has filed a federal lawsuit accusing county police and a detective with the Pittsburgh Police Department of unlawful, reckless behavior that led him to be falsely arrested and imprisoned.</p> <p>Mr. Selton, 35, will be filing a similar lawsuit, said Paul Jubas, a lawyer in Pittsburgh who is representing both men. The lawsuits are seeking unspecified monetary damages.</p> <p>The Allegheny County police, the county district attorney's office and the Pittsburgh Police Department declined to comment on the lawsuit.</p> <p>"That shooting remains under review by our office," said Mike Manko, a spokesman for Allegheny County's district attorney, Stephen A. Zappala Jr.</p> |

The prosecutors were not named in the lawsuit because they were protected from civil liability, the result of [a 1976 Supreme Court case](#). Mr. Jubas said he would be filing a complaint against prosecutors with the state's disciplinary board.

"They definitely ruined his life," said Brittany Shelton, 30, Mr. Shelton's sister. "It was just such a sad situation. They accused two innocent people instead of putting in work to find the right people."

The shooting occurred around 11 p.m. on March 9, 2016, as guests at the backyard barbecue were taking selfies. A man wielding a pistol began firing at them from an alley behind the yard, according to the lawsuit.

The guests tried to run up the back porch stairs to the house, but a second gunman, with an assault rifle, was waiting for them behind a fence.

The victims included Jerry Shelton, 35; Tina Shelton, 37; Brittany Powell, 27; Chanetta Powell, 25, who was pregnant; and Shada Mahone, 26.

A sixth person, [John Ellis](#), was paralyzed because of his injuries and died in September 2020. He was 51, according to the lawsuit.

The case stunned the county and Wilkinsburg, a suburb just east of Pittsburgh with a population of about 16,000 that has [struggled with drug trafficking and gun violence](#).

"Until the Tree of Life murders, this was the worst crime in Allegheny County history," Mr. Jubas said, referring to the [shootings at a Pittsburgh synagogue in 2018 that killed 11 people](#).

Investigators in the Wilkinsburg case, Mr. Jubas said, based charges against Mr. Thomas and Mr. Shelton on a "very poorly cobbled together investigation."

After their arrest, the men were sent to Allegheny County Jail. If convicted, they could have faced the death penalty under state law.

The police never recovered physical evidence that connected the men to the shootings and there was no eyewitness testimony of the men at the scene, according to the lawsuit.

Instead, the police relied on two jailhouse informants, who were in the same cell block with the defendants and agreed to testify against the men, according to the lawsuit.

Mr. Jubas called both informants unreliable: One had threatened a judge in a separate case and the other had been identified by judges as an "agent of the state," whose testimony was being suppressed in other criminal cases. By 2018, prosecutors had dropped both informants as witnesses.

Instead of dismissing the charges, prosecutors presented a new witness: another jailhouse informant who had been placed in the same cell block as Mr. Thomas, according to the lawsuit.

In exchange for his testimony, the informant was given immunity in another case, the 2013 death of Marcus White Jr., a 15-month-old boy killed during a shooting in the East Hills neighborhood of Pittsburgh. But prosecutors did not tell the defense lawyers for Mr. Shelton or Mr. Thomas, or the family of the little boy, about the deal, according to the lawsuit.

Law enforcement officials "engaged in a conspiracy to prevent the information related to exculpatory evidence of the informant's immunity for the Marcus White Jr. murder from being discovered," the lawsuit said.

When defense lawyers for Mr. Thomas eventually learned of the deal, the informant was dropped as a witness and a judge dismissed the case against him.

Mr. Shelton was acquitted of charges of homicide but eventually pleaded guilty to a federal gun charge after a firearm was found at his mother's house. The gun was not connected to the Wilksburg killings, Mr. Jubas said.

Mr. Shelton was sentenced to eight years for the gun charge, his lawyer said.

Mr. Shelton's two sons, who are 12 and 8, moved to Georgia because the family was worried about their safety, said his sister, a nurse who also moved out of Allegheny County to start a new life.

Mr. Thomas, [who was released from jail in February 2020](#), was arrested last month, when he was accused of assaulting a woman he knew at a gas station. The police said the two began arguing, he refused to let her get out of the car and at one point put his hands around her neck.

He remains in custody at Allegheny County Jail. He has pleaded not guilty.

The police in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County declined to say whether an investigation into the barbecue shooting had been reopened.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Black FedEx MS driver shot at by white men |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/feb/11/dmonterrio-gibson-black-fedex-driver-shot-white-men-ahmaud-arbery |
| GIST | <p>A Black FedEx driver who was allegedly shot at by a white father and son in Mississippi while delivering packages said he “can definitely see the similarities” between his case and that of Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man who was murdered in 2020 by three white men while jogging in Georgia.</p> <p>“Because Ahmaud Arbery didn’t survive to speak up for himself, so I want to take that upon myself to do that for me and him as well,” said D’Monterrio Gibson, 24, in an interview with CNN on Friday.</p> <p>The father and son, Brandon and Gregory Case, were reportedly arrested and charged this week over the incident.</p> <p>According to Gibson, he was delivering packages on an evening route in Brookhaven, Mississippi, on 24 January when the two men allegedly chased him in a truck for several minutes and fired at least five shots towards his van.</p> <p>“They came out of nowhere,” he said at a news conference on Thursday. “Even if [the van] was unmarked, civilians still can’t take the law into their own hands ... I’m thinking this is a racism thing,” he added.</p> <p>According to the Washington Post, Gregory Case was driving the pickup truck and attempted to cut Gibson off as he was trying to leave. Gibson then swerved around the truck to get out of the neighborhood.</p> <p>Gibson described the alleged attack in an interview with the Mississippi Free press. “I drive down about two or three houses,” Gibson said. “There’s another guy [Brandon Case] standing in the middle of the street pointing a gun at my windows and signaling me to stop with his hands, as well as mouthing the word, ‘Stop.’ I shake my head no, I hide behind the steering wheel, and I swerve around him as well. As I swerve around him, he starts firing shots into my vehicle.”</p> <p>He added that when he called the police to report the shootings, a dispatcher interrupted him and asked if he had been on Junior Trail, the street where he was delivering the packages.</p> <p>“I said, ‘Yes.’ He was like, ‘Well I just got a call of a suspicious person at this address,’” Gibson recalled at Thursday’s press briefing. He replied to the dispatcher and said, “Sir, I’m not a suspicious person. I work for FedEx. I was just doing my job.”</p> |

The Cases were arrested on 1 February, over a week after the incident. According to court records reviewed by the Washington Post, Brandon Case, 35, was charged with feloniously attempting to cause bodily harm with a firearm and a deadly weapon. His 58-year-old father, Gregory Case, was charged with unlawfully and feloniously conspiring to commit aggravated assault. The father and son were released from jail the next day on bail.

Despite the charges, Gibson and his lawyers argue that the local police are not taking the case seriously and are calling for a [federal hate crimes investigation](#).

“Some semblance of justice was served, but we’re disappointed since we think the charges should be attempted murder because that’s what it was,” said Carlos E Moore, one of Gibson’s lawyers.

Gibson said he was initially reluctant to speak out about the incident until he was reminded of Arbery’s murder – which also involved a white father and son - and similar incidents over the years in which Black people were killed while simply going about their lives.

“I thought about all the people who ain’t here to speak [for themselves],” Gibson told reporters. “I’m just looking at everything way different now ... You can just die doing your job.”

The Cases and their attorneys have yet to comment publicly on the situation.

In a statement to the Associated Press, FedEx condemned the incident, saying, “FedEx takes situations of this nature very seriously, and we are shocked by this criminal act against our team member. ... The safety of our team members is our top priority, and we remain focused on his wellbeing. We will continue to support Mr Gibson as we cooperate with investigating authorities.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/12 Mexico cartels gouge lime prices to soar |
| SOURCE | https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/12/mexico-lime-prices-shortages-cartels |
| GIST | <p>The citric kick of the limes which grow abundantly across Mexico – the world’s largest producer of the fruit – help give the country’s cuisine its distinctive flavour.</p> <p>But aggressive price-fixing by criminal groups has sent prices soaring, prompting some eateries to stop offering limes with their tacos – and leaving diners in a sour twist.</p> <p>“If you go to the <i>taquería</i> they tell you there is no lime, or there is one small lime for 10 people,” said Romain Le Cour, security and violence reduction program officer at the thinktank México Evalúa. “It’s almost a joke.”</p> <p>Prices often peak in winter but this year they have reached unprecedented highs, due to falling production, continued exports and colder weather. The average cost of limes has tripled since January 2021 – from 17 pesos (almost a dollar) to 56 pesos per kilo, according to state data.</p> <p>And amid an escalating cost-of-living crisis due to inflation, cartels are imposing increasing controls over producers during the bumper crop season – in part to fund an escalating war in the western state of Michoacán where the aggressive expansion of the Jalisco New Generation cartel (JNGC) has unleashed a bitter conflict with a coalition of local groups known as the United Cartels.</p> <p>“The lime trade is a billion-dollar industry and, for any criminal group, it’s very easy and extremely profitable for them to go to the farmers and tell them what they need to pay for protection,” said Le Cour. “It’s classic mafia.”</p> <p>The harvest in Michoacán in December was down 26% from the month before and almost half on the same period last year – 66,000 tons less, according to official data.</p> |

In places, cartels have reportedly limited picking to just a few days a week to more easily manipulate prices. “The cartels impose the price of the lime, they decide whether or not to pick them,” an industry worker [told](#) Reforma newspaper.

Some farmers have abandoned their fields to avoid dealing with the cartels amid serious harassment and fighting, while bandits have also been stealing large amounts of limes in transit. Others have reportedly been forcibly displaced. A producer in El Aguaje, Michoacán, [told local media](#): “They took away our land, they took away our houses, they looted our lime orchards.”

More than 2,800 Mexican army and national guard troops have been deployed to the state in an attempt to dampen the cartel violence after alleged JNGC members dug ditches to cut off a key road.

It’s not just the lime trade which has been ensnared by cartels. A large majority of Mexico’s exports of [avocados](#) also come from Michoacán – the site of [some of the fiercest battles](#) following the launch of the militarised war on drugs in 2006.

Prices of the “green gold” fruit are spiking. Already, it is rarely served at *taquerías* in large quantities unless guacamole is purchased separately. But there are fears that the costly lime could force widespread taco price hikes after some eateries moved to mitigate the growing expense from the citrus fruit.

“These lime price rises were a long time coming,” said Gustavo Arellano, author of Taco USA: How Mexican [Food](#) Conquered America, who adds that cartels have been influencing fruit prices for years amid the growing popularity of Mexican food abroad.

“It’s a perfect storm of problems with limes. And sadly, the American consumer only cares about their margarita and squeezing wedges of lime on their tacos. Limes and avocados have essentially become the edible version of drugs, due to the misery their growing consumption is causing.”

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Jobless scam operated out of Calif. prisons |
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| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/feds-allege-record-25-million-in-claims-from-jobless-scram |
| GIST | <p>SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — An unemployment scam operated out of California prisons sought a record \$25 million from the state and U.S. governments, netting more than \$5 million that went for vehicles, furniture, handbags and jewelry, federal authorities said Friday.</p> <p>The \$25 million is the largest known single intended haul in California, said former U.S. attorney McGregor Scott, who is working with the state Employment Development Department to coordinate investigations into fraud related to pandemic relief.</p> <p>Yet it and the \$5 million actual loss remains a fraction of the more than \$20 billion in unemployment benefits that authorities believe has been stolen since March 2020 as the state approved fraudulent payments in the names of death row inmates and even U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein.</p> <p>Inmates Daryol Richmond, 31, and Telvin Breaux, 30, both from Los Angeles County, falsely claimed that they and others including minor children had been selling clothing or working as handymen, mechanics or in other jobs until they became unemployed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a new indictment alleges.</p> <p>Richmond is imprisoned at Kern Valley State Prison in Delano, serving a nearly 25-year sentence as a repeat offender for robbery and attempted robbery with various enhancements, according to corrections officials.</p> <p>Breaux is in the California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi, serving five years for robbery with a firearm, among other offenses.</p> |

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| | <p>They used contraband cellphones, emails and telephone calls from prison to communicate with others outside the prisons, investigators say.</p> <p>The new indictment charges them along with six Southern California residents with conspiracy to commit mail fraud and aggravated identity theft, charges that carry a maximum penalty of 20 years in federal prison and a \$250,000 fine.</p> <p>They are alleged to have created bogus email accounts and used different street addresses across Southern California to file more than 400 fake claims.</p> <p>Once they were mailed debit cards for their relief claims, investigators said they withdrew the cash at different locations, on different days and times, and in varying amounts in a bid to escape authorities' notice.</p> <p>Richmond has negotiated a plea agreement that calls for him to plead guilty but pay restitution not to exceed \$382,000. It calls for an additional sentence of no less than about four years in prison.</p> <p>Breaux's attorney, Austin Dove, did not respond to telephone and email requests for comment Friday evening.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Businesses' insurance coverage at risk |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/local/insurance-coverage-at-risk-for-seattle-businesses-hit-hard-by-property-crime |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE — A spike in theft and vandalism has many Seattle business owners eating the losses instead of filing insurance claims because they fear their coverage will be dropped.</p> <p>A coalition of business groups turned to city councilmembers this week to help address these insurance concerns. The broken windows and break-ins are pushing the limits of their policies, they said, and could force them to close-up shop.</p> <p>Steele Barber in Ballard got off to a rough start after it first opened in late 2020. Criminals smashed into the upscale salon and spa, stealing thousands of dollars in goods and causing extensive damage.</p> <p>"The big challenge was I thought that's what theft insurance was for so I used it and was promptly dropped," Humphrey said.</p> <p>As a broker helped Humphrey search for a new company to provide coverage, Humphrey was shocked not only by the lack of options for businesses operating in Seattle but also by the price.</p> <p>"It's costing me \$3,000 or \$4,000 more a year," Humphrey said.</p> <p>Businesses overwhelmed by Seattle's mounting crime turned to the city council this week and among the requests was help with insurance. Dan Austin, owner of Peel & Press in West Seattle, was among those who testified during the roundtable discussion.</p> <p>"I was broken into twice in the first year of the pandemic," Austin said. "Those two break-ins were not covered by insurance because they were just below the threshold that made it worth it and those are the differences from me breaking even to losing money."</p> <p>Since the initial break-in, Humphrey has dealt with another five incidents that left windows smashed, doors busted and merchandise missing. He paid out of pocket to cover the losses, wanting to save his insurance for a catastrophe.</p> |

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| | <p>“My year to date net loss is a little over \$25,000 which for me is a big deal as a small business,” he said.</p> <p>Humphrey is investing in his staff. Last week his workers stopped a man armed with a wrench before he could attack a woman passing by outside the salon. To help, Humphrey has hired a retired ATF agent to train those workers to better handle the violence that sometimes takes place right outside.</p> <p>“So we're going to do a whole team meeting on security because it's gotten worse in the last year,” Humphrey said. “His expertise is on de-escalation, what you do in those scenarios so they know how to react.”</p> <p>City councilmembers are now considering several requests regarding the property crime and insurance challenges. Businesses are asking for a grant program to help pay for repairs. Such grants have ranged from \$500 to \$5,000 in recent pilot programs.</p> <p>Business owners also want a study to compare insurance rates and availability across different neighborhoods. The study could identify unfair burdens on certain areas or businesses so insurance access can be more equitable, they said.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Seattle, King Co. target serial retail thieves |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/operation-crime-justice/king-county-prosecutors-seattle-join-to-stop-organized-crime-rings-targeting-local-stores |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE — A serial theft suspect whose crime ring allegedly targets retailers in Seattle, Kirkland, Tukwila and Lynnwood has been arrested and was formally charged this week in connection with a series of brazen thefts in which thousands of dollars of merchandise was taken.</p> <p>Charles Joiner, 28, was taken into custody this week in King County and charged with first-degree organized retail theft. As of Friday evening, he remained at the King County Jail in lieu of \$110,125 bond.</p> <p>Several store surveillance videos obtained by KOMO News show Joiner taking a trove of perfume and other products from several Ulta Beauty Stores with the stores reporting a total loss of \$30,372. And even when he was confronted by staff or security, he did not stop, officials said.</p> <p>Joiner's arrest marks a shift in strategy by local law enforcement agencies.</p> <p>King County prosecutors and the new Seattle City Attorney are now working together to halt shoplifting suspects who repeatedly target retailers in Western Washington.</p> <p>But for months, KOMO News has pressed city leaders to find out why Joiner and other repeat criminals just like him are not being held accountable.</p> <p>When Joiner appeared in court this week, the judge ruled that KOMO News could not show his face.</p> <p>But his mug shot was easy to find because he has been convicted of five felony thefts, four gross misdemeanors and he has been the subject of at least 15 arrest warrants for failing to appear since 2012.</p> <p>Businesses near the crime sprees said they have had enough.</p> <p>At Indulge Desserts, they’ve been serving up smiles, while watching their backs and boosting security.</p> <p>“It doesn’t make sense to me why they’re continuing to get away with things like that,” said owner Michele Auld. “It’s frustrating and scary as a small business.</p> <p>“I think they’re becoming more brazen because there don’t seem to be any consequences,” Auld said. “We always tell children, ‘You have to be accountable for your actions’ and now that seems not to be true.”</p> |

Leesa Manion, chief of staff for the King County Prosecutor's Office, leads a new task force that aims to put organized retail thieves on notice.

The Seattle City Attorney's Office, the Downtown Seattle Association and the Seattle Chamber of Commerce are part of the joint effort to bring the crime ring thefts to an end.

By teaming up with the city attorney's office, which handles low-level misdemeanors, county prosecutors plan to pinpoint repeat offenders and aggregate their crimes so they can rise to felony level.

We hear businesses and we're working on addressing this," Manion said. "I think we can all agree that there's a great difference between someone who has a first-time brush with the law. But these are the individuals who go into a store in an organized way, steal, come back, and steal again in a very blatant way. It's not the individual who's stealing to survive.

The plan also includes better training for retail stores' loss prevention officers at big box outlets like the downtown Target, where KOMO News recently chronicled the case of John Lomack, accused of shoplifting there 22 times. H

He was caught on camera trying to haul a 70-inch flat screen television out of the store without paying for it.

KOMO News asked if prosecutors believe this is the start of a deterrent to people who are systematically committing crimes.

"I hope it will be a deterrent and time will prove to us if its deterrent," Manion said. "I think prosecution serves an important role because it talks about accountability and it's about holding people accountable for the actions they've taken and presently taken I don't know that it's actually effective in preventing future crime, but we'll see."

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Tacoma stores hit by a string of robberies |
| SOURCE | https://komonews.com/news/local/tacoma-businesses-hit-by-a-string-of-robberies |
| GIST | <p>TACOMA, Wash. — Four times in the last three months TSM Shop has been broken into. Most recently, someone even stole an entire rack of shirts.</p> <p>It's going to cost around \$2,000 just to fix the window.</p> <p>Now employees at this store that's known for their custom t-shirts are having to keep a close eye on their inventory.</p> <p>"I used to keep my bike and backpack and stuff here, and sometimes, like now when we have finished products over night," said Soren Iverson, who is employee at TSM Shop. "We just hide them."</p> <p>Now they are taking safety measures into their own hands</p> <p>"We've installed security cameras and beyond that I don't know what other security measures we can take," Iverson said. "We were thinking of putting bars up in our window."</p> <p>Johnson Candy Company is right next door and the staff is busy with the Valentine's Day rush.</p> <p>Bill Johnson, whose family owns the store, said they have five smashed windows just from the last two weeks alone.</p> <p>"Windows are \$700 or \$800 a piece it adds up pretty quick," Johnson said.</p> |

It's one of the busiest times of the year for them and now more has been added to their plate.

"You kind of feel like you're alone bearing the brunt of this incident a lot of times when these happen," Johnson said.

Last week, Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards unveiled a plan to help businesses that have been targeted by crime. Part of that is allocating \$300,000 for window repairs.

In a statement to KOMO news, Woodards said:

"This issue is deeply concerning to me. Vandalism like broken windows can significantly strain local businesses, many of which are also grappling with the economic impacts of COVID. Because of this, earlier this month, I introduced a package of business support initiatives, including financial support to help alleviate the financial impacts of window repairs. The criteria for who qualifies and a process for how the dollars will be distributed is scheduled to be presented and discussed in the City Council's Economic Development Committee on February 22nd.

While we are looking into these specific incidents and finding innovative ways we can support our businesses, I want to be clear that we are also continuing to work with the Police Department and our new Police Chief on more long-term strategies and solutions to address crime."

That plan does include money for short term private security.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Police: new laws halt pursuit of prolific thief |
| SOURCE | https://www.q13fox.com/news/hes-a-menace-kitsap-county-deputies-looking-for-prolific-car-thief |
| GIST | <p>PORT ORCHARD, Wash. - Kitsap County Sheriff's Deputies are looking for a man they say is a prolific car thief, who recently rammed a stolen vehicle into parked cars, including a patrol vehicle.</p> <p>Deputies say 26-year-old Brandon Charles Ervin is a transient who mostly lives in vehicles he stole. He has been seen all over Kitsap County, and favors Honda's, but will probably take anything, deputies say.</p> <p>On Feb. 8, deputies found him in a car and tried to contact him. Ervin rammed into a Kitsap County Sheriff's deputy's vehicle while before escaping, deputies said.</p> <p>He sped away from the scene, but was several yards from a school, deputies said. Deputies did not chase him because, at that point, it would have been a danger to the public.</p> <p>Ervin is also suspected of several other car thefts, including one that left him and another driver in serious condition after a high-speed crash in November 2021. He was taken to the hospital after that crash but not booked.</p> <p>In another instance back in January, Port Orchard police were notified that there was a stolen vehicle in a Goodwill parking lot. The driver, who police say was Ervin, rammed the stolen car into a patrol vehicle and hit other cars before making his escape.</p> <p>"We are looking hard for Brandon Ervin, who is a prolific car thief in our county, has been very active lately. He's a menace. We need to get him into custody. We have several warrants out for his arrest and we need to find him and get him off the streets," said Kitsap County Sheriff's Lt. Ken Dickinson.</p> <p>However, police say they were unable to pursue Ervin after he drove off due to new Washington laws.</p> <p>"Prior to the house bills passing, that would have been something that we could have pursued. But we always have to take into account what the risk is to doing that to the public," said Port Orchard deputy</p> |

police chief Donna Main. "I know for sure we couldn't that day because of the new house bill. It's frustrating."

In 2021, Washington's legislature modified police accountability laws. Some changes included not allowing officers to start a high-speed chase to catch low-level crimes like car theft or shoplifting. The law also said if a person is a suspect of a violent crime, police can only chase if there is probable cause the person committed the crime.

"We've had a lot of suspects that probably did the crime walk away. And then we find out all the pieces to that and then we're like, well, that was our person. But we had to let them go because we didn't have probable cause at the time," said Main.

Law enforcement officials say Ervin is just a small part of a larger problem involving car thefts in western Washington.

The Puget Sound Auto Theft Task Force just recently released new numbers highlighting the growing problem of car thefts. In King County, 1,455 vehicles were stolen in January alone. In Pierce County, more than 905 vehicles were stolen in January, which is down slightly from the 915 in December.

In Kitsap County, where Ervin is usually found, thieves stole more than 190 vehicles in January, which is up from 151 in December and an even smaller 86 in November of 2021.

"We have had a rash of car thefts in our county, which many other counties have been having. He's involved in many of those. He's been running away from us routinely," said Dickinson.

Ervin is a white man with red hair and a beard. He is about 6'01" and weighs around 170 pounds. He has the words "Beautiful Struggle" tattooed on his right arm and has a crown tattooed on his left hand.

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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Downtown Seattle: 4 shootings in 3 days |
| SOURCE | https://www.q13fox.com/news/four-shootings-in-three-days-throughout-downtown-districts-of-seattle |
| GIST | <p>SEATTLE - In the last three days, there have been four shootings in Seattle, all near the downtown districts of the city.</p> <p>On Friday, Seattle Police say a suspect shot an employee during a robbery at Key Bank in the SODO District. It happened around 1 p.m. on the 1900 block of 1st Avenue South.</p> <p>First responders raced the 34-year-old victim to the hospital. Police say the victim is in stable condition.</p> <p>However, the suspect got away.</p> <p>"It's pretty startling. They [police] don't have any pictures of the person or anything for me to alert my staff, like, to keep an eye out, to sort of help. And knowing that they are out there, is kind of scary," said Ashlee Nolan.</p> <p>Nolan is the operations manager for Paseo, a restaurant a few feet from the shooting. She says driving into work and seeing the police activity is frightening, but not surprising.</p> <p>Crime rates in Seattle are continuing to rise. Statistics show 2021 saw a 40% increase in shootings. City officials say it is at an all-time high.</p> <p>This week has been especially violent. Seattle had four shootings in three days.</p> <p>The most recent incident is this Friday's bank robbery shooting.</p> |

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| | <p>The other shootings happened on Wednesday in Pioneer Square around 1:30 p.m., and then there were two separate shootings in the International District on Thursday. The first happened around 1:30 a.m. and the second happened around 6:30 p.m.</p> <p>In total, since Feb. 4, there have been seven shootings in the city. One of them was fatal.</p> <p>FOX 13 News reached out to new Seattle City Mayor Bruce Harrell about this crime trend. His office provided a statement that reads in part:</p> <p><i>"One of Mayor Harrell's first hires was a gun violence prevention liaison. Together, they are working directly with those impacted on community-based solutions, striving to prevent gun violence before it begins. He continues to advocate for improved staffing at SPD that allows for swift responses during emergencies and thorough investigations when gun violence does occur. Finally, he supports pilot programs for new technologies and is pushing for further regional coordination and legislative change in Olympia that allows the City to pursue innovative new laws to address this crisis."</i></p> <p>For people working in these areas affected by crime, like Nolan, she believes it will take the entire community to fix this problem.</p> <p>"The person in charge doesn't make all the decisions. They don't make all the plans. They don't do all the foresight. It takes a whole team of people to do that," she said.</p> |
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| HEADLINE | 02/11 Bystander fired at suspect; protect officers |
| SOURCE | https://www.q13fox.com/news/whatcom-county-deputies-shot-unknown-civilian-fired-back-at-suspect-to-protect-officers-from-further-injury |
| GIST | <p>PEACEFUL VALLEY, Wash. - A bystander fired back at a suspect who police say shot two Whatcom County deputies in the head after a dispute between neighbors in Maple Falls, Washington.</p> <p>Trooper Jacob Kennett tweeted that the shooting occurred around 4:20 p.m. near Peaceful Valley and SR 547.</p> <p>According to the Bellingham Police, the agency handling the investigation, the suspect, a 60-year-old Maple Falls man, got into a dispute with his neighbor over a burning garbage pile that was sending smoke into his house.</p> <p>Police said the suspect went into his house, grabbed a shotgun and fired a round into the air toward his neighbor.</p> <p>Soon after, deputies arrived and ordered the suspect to drop his gun. He fired at the deputies - shooting one of them in the head. The second deputy stepped forward firing at the suspect and the second deputy was also struck in the head by the gunfire.</p> <p>Police said an "unknown civilian" stepped forward and fired multiple rounds from a handgun to protect the deputies from further injury. The deputies were then pulled into a garage where first aid was given until help arrived.</p> <p>More deputies came to the scene, and the suspect came out of the house and surrendered.</p> <p>One deputy was taken in stable condition to PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center. The other deputy was taken in stable condition to Harborview Medical Center in Seattle.</p> <p>"We are ever so grateful the WCSO deputies are in stable condition and that no residents were injured," said Bellingham Police Chief Flo Simon.</p> |

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| | The suspect has been taken into custody and booked into Skagit County Jail on two counts of attempted murder in the first degree. Bail has been set at \$5 million |
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